

Following the King – study three

The Essentials of Discipleship – John 15:1 – 8

Just before Jesus went to the cross, he described his relationship with his disciples as being like a vine and its branches. Jesus said, *"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). The wider context of this statement is that Jesus had just told his disciples that he was about to go away from them for a time (e.g. John 13:33). This raises the question, 'how are Jesus' followers to remain with him (or in him) during his absence? Jesus went on to assure his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to remain with us and walk beside us. But he also commanded his followers to remain in him by remembering his words and doing all that he taught us to do (e.g. John 15:9 – 10). These instructions are strikingly similar to Christ's Great Commission that we looked at last week, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19 – 20). In the same way, Christ's teaching in John's gospel also reminds us that in order to become fruitful disciples we must keep following Christ closely and depending on his power and presence for our productivity. Whether we're talking about producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (e.g. love, joy, peace, etc), the fruit of humble obedience, or the fruitfulness that comes from leading others to Christ, no fruit can be produced outside the Vine, who is Christ. Therefore let's take time now to consider what it means to be fruitful vines in Christ.

Good Bible commentary notes on this passage can be found online at:

www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/John/Jesus-Calls-Disciples-Remain

1. Read John 15:1 – 3. Explain the actual role of God the Father as the symbolic 'gardener' who 'prunes back or cuts off branches' from 'the true vine'¹.
2. How are Christ's disciples cleansed through believing his (God's) word?² (15:3)
3. Read John 15:4. How do we remain in Christ?
4. Read John 15:5. What does it mean to bear fruit through Christ?
5. Read John 15:6. Why are fruitless branches considered worthless, cut off and thrown into the fire? What does this mean in real terms?
6. Read John 15:7. What does Jesus mean when he says, *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you"*?
7. How does producing much fruit give glory to God and prove that we are Christ's disciples?
8. How can we become more fruitful disciples of Christ?

¹ The vine or vineyard was a common symbol of the nation Israel in the Old Testament and elsewhere.

² The original term for pruning a vine (or cutting it back) is literally, 'to clean' it. Thus Jesus' statement in 15:2 – 3 literally reads, "Every branch that does not bear fruit my Father 'cleans' [i.e. prunes]... You are already 'clean' because of the word I have spoken to you." Also see Jesus' words in John 13:8 – 11.