



SERVE 3

John 15 v 1 to 17

The Vine and the branches

We are continuing a series on the work of the Holy Spirit and how he empowers us to **SERVE** the Body of Christ – the local church.

This section of John's gospel focusses on Jesus' immanent departure. He is concerned for his disciples and that their three years with him will become a distant memory with no lasting impact. They will all go back to their day jobs and forget him. In the previous chapter we have seen that he assures them that he will not leave them desolate (14:18). The emphasis in chapter 15 switches slightly to 'remaining'. Jesus paints a vivid picture of a vine trimmed by its gardener that produces generous fruit. He is telling them to remain vitally attached to him so that they might produce 'spiritual fruit'.

1. Using the image of the vine, talk about times where Jesus has felt remote from your own life. What have you done to draw closer to the Lord?
Talk about times where God's presence has been very real to you.

There is a whole variety of relationships in this chapter.

- With CHRIST there is a relationship of REMAINING (v 1 to 11)
- With FELLOW BELIEVERS there is a relationship of LOVE (v 12 to 17)
- With the WORLD there is a relationship of HOSTILITY (v 18 to 25)

2. Which of these relationships are the hardest struggle?
Is it easy to lose your sense of remaining in Christ?
Is it sometimes hard to love your fellow Christians?
Do you find the world is hostile to your faith?

Just like Jesus took the image of the shepherd in chapter 10 and turned it into a description of his life and work, he does the same with the familiar image of the vine. Why did Jesus use this image? The vine was an old and sacred image in Judaism. The vine represented the covenant people of God, planted and tended by God so that Israel would produce fruit (Psalm 80:8, Isaiah 5:1 to 7 and many more)

In New Testament times the image was still popular (Early coins have been found embossed with the vine image). Jesus declares he is 'the true vine'(15:1). He is saying that he has taken the place of the old covenant. God's vineyard now contains one vine – no longer is Israel seen as vines growing in God's vineyard. Men and women are now branches growing from one stock.

3. Why would Jewish listeners find this hard to accept?
Jesus has challenged their understanding? If you want to 'remain in him (God)' the only way was to remain grafted to his son Jesus.
What aspects of the old covenant would have been threatened by this new teaching?

As in the Old Testament, God is eager to see fruit coming from his work in tending the vines (15:2). Vine dressers trim branches so they will produce more fruit and cut away dead branches that have no life in them.

4. What does this pruning mean for us?
What is God wanting to trim or prune?
Are we willing to let him do it?
You might like to talk honestly about bits of your life that God has pruned.

The key idea running through this passage is the concept of 'remaining' (verse 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10). The growing disciple in whom the Father and Son live (14:20 & 23) through the Spirit (14:16 & 25) is one whose life is utterly dependent on Christ. It is not just about acknowledging who Jesus is, it is having Jesus spiritually connected to our lives.

5. Is this idea of total dependence on Christ hard to grasp?
Do we sometimes rely too much on our own resources?
Are we too self-sufficient?
Could this be a reason why our walk with Christ sometimes feels very distant?

But there is a very clear warning for those who fail to remain in Christ (15:6). There is one sure sign that the branch in the vine is healthy – if it produces fruit. (15:5). 'Apart from me you can do nothing'. So, we must develop our relationship with Jesus – then fruit will grow. Fruit bearing is not a test – a branch does not have to demonstrate productivity to survive destruction,

6. Fruit-bearing is by-product of being connected to the vine.
Are we sometimes frustrated by our lack of fruitfulness?
What can we do to be more fruitful?
Do we want to be?

In verses 7 to 11 Jesus draws out some of the implications of remaining in him.

We are to stay in his word (v7)

The 'peace' of 14:27 is now matched with the 'joy' (15:11) - it is one of the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)

7. Talk about the joy you have had when your relationship with God is flourishing.

The last section from v12 to 17 talks about the character of life among Jesus followers. Jesus tells them they must imitate he had done. (v12). Our 'way of loving' should be shaped by how Jesus loved us. Human love is shaped by Christ's love for his people.

We are to be his friends (v14 & 15). This is there to say we are not servants who never share the deeper thoughts of their master. Rather we are friends who long for intimacy.

8. Spend some time praying that you will truly learn what it means to love the members of your group and reflect Christ's love into the life of others

