

We are on the final stretch of the The Gospels Series, and we are focusing on the Passion Week, the final days of Jesus' life on earth. **Today, we are talking about the vine and the branches in John 15.**

The story takes place in Jerusalem, during the annual Passover Festival in the year 33AD, almost 2,000 years ago. It was Thursday evening, the day before Jesus was crucified. Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover meal together, in the private upper room of a guest home. Jesus had just washed the disciples feet and taught them about agape love.

Let's continue reading the story.

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me." "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 1When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!" John 15:1-11 NLT

Jesus used the the image of a grapevine and its branches to illustrate dependance on him. The vine is the source of life for the branches, so it's essential for the branches to stay connected to the vine in order to produce healthy grapes. An experienced gardener cuts off the branches that don't produce fruit, and prunes the branches that do so that they will produce even more fruit.

Jesus is the vine, the source of life, real and eternal life. He is the source of life itself. The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through Him, and nothing was created except through Him. In Him was life (The Word gave life to everything that was created.)" John 1:1-4 ESV. And the book of Hebrews says, "He upholds and sustains the universe by the power of his word." Hebrews 1:3 ESV. Jesus gave life to everything that was created and he sustains it by the power of his word. Look around, everything you see in the world, and the things you cannot see, finds life in Jesus. When I look outside my window, I see bright green leaves on the trees, pink cherry tree blossoms and purple azalea flowers. These beautiful plants exist because of Jesus, and nothing exists without Him.

Jesus is real and eternal life. He said, "This is real and eternal life: That they know you, the one and only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent." John 17:3 MSG. Real and eternal life is being in a never-ending, always expanding, relationship with God the Father, through Jesus Christ, by power of Holy Spirit. Many people are familiar with the idea that eternal life is a never-ending relationship with God in heaven one day, but the idea that you can experience real and eternal life today in your "everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life" is hard to grasp. The Apostle Paul helped make sense of this when he said, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23 ESV. In other words, the natural result of knowing God is that you will experience more and more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control in your life.

What if this is the life you've been looking for the whole time? What if the love you are looking for in your relationship can only be found in God? What if the happiness you are looking for in the next adventure can only be found in God? What if the peace of mind you are looking for in your job can only be found in God? The truth is nothing in this world can satisfy your thirst for real and eternal life. King Solomon said, "God has placed eternity in the human heart." Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT. St. Augustine said, " You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." The things of this world are gifts to enjoy, not gods to worship. When we get this wrong, we are left restless and wanting more. The good news is that Jesus Christ is the source of real and eternal life, and he has invited you to experience it. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16 ESV.

God the Father is the gardener who works in the vineyard to make it flourish. Jesus said His Father removes the branches that don't produce fruit and He prunes the branches that do so they will produce even more fruit. God sometimes removes unhealthy people from your life and even your church community, because these people drain the life and health out of relationships. In the future, God will permanently separate unbelievers from himself on the day of judgment. God not only removes unfruitful branches, he prunes fruitful ones. The pruning represents how God uses painful experiences to help his children grow in faith and in character. This means when life is difficult, you need to remember that God is working behind the scenes of your life to help you grow stronger.

Followers of Jesus are the branches. Jesus said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches, remain in me, and I will remain in you." Remaining in Jesus means staying connected to him. This means you must stay connected to Jesus in order to be healthy and growing.

Jesus said, "A branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine." In the same way, if you don't stay connected to Jesus, your life will be unfruitful. This means as a Follower of Jesus, if you don't stay connected to him, your life will be loveless, joyless and lacking peace. This is the reason why you can know Jesus, yet still be rude, grumpy and anxious. How sad is that, we have a direct connection to the source of real and eternal life, yet we can choose to remain disconnected.

On the other hand, Jesus said, "Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit." If you stay connected to Jesus, your life will flourish. This is great news! Real and eternal life is available to us today by simply staying connected to Jesus. The choice is yours!

So how do we stay connected to Jesus? Most people get this wrong by emphasizing one spiritual discipline over others, and then wonder why they're not experiencing more life. For example, some people pray for their marriage to change, but neglect to do the hard work of marriage, and then wonder why it's not changing. While others do the hard work of marriage, but neglect to pray, and then wonder why it's not getting better. One approach emphasizes the power of prayer and the other the power of obedience. **The truth is you need both prayer and practice to stay connected to Jesus!**

Jesus modeled seeking God daily through prayer. The Gospels show how Jesus always disappeared to be alone with his Father. He knew that dependence on God through prayer was the source of his power for ministry. The same is true for us, even more so. When you seek God in prayer He fills you with power to do what you could never do on your own.

Jesus said, "When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love..." This means practicing the way of Jesus helps you stay connected to him. Whenever you obey God you unlock his power in your life. Jesus said, "I tell you these things for your joy, yes, your joy will overflow."

If you want to experience real and eternal life in your daily life, you must stay connected to Jesus!

How do you need God to move in your life today? He is ready and available to help.

Prayer-- Father God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sin. Thank you for making a way for us to know you, the source of real and eternal life. Thank you for showing us the best way to live in the example of Jesus. Help us by the power of the Holy Spirit in us to live in obedience to your way of life. We give you all the praise and glory. Amen.