

How Does Your Garden Grow?

*Clinging
to the
Vine*

John 15:4

FCCFS



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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.

Special Music: "Cling to Christ" SovereignGraceMusic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twN0QiTO0bs>

CLINGING FRUIT

The dawn bounced
Among the dewdrops
Gathered on fruit and leaves
As they cling to their mother vine.

The fruit,
Not quite ripe,
Savors the water
Of balanced nutrients
Like a suckling child
Seeking only to grow
In preparation for its
Fall from dependence
To independence.

Its only self-purpose
To create a new vine
And nurture her own fruit
In that same rising dawn.
Vine begets fruit,
Begets seed,
Begets Vine.

As Christians,
We cling to the vine of Christ
Drawing nurture from within,
Fed by everlasting water
As we ripen into new fruit.

Waiting for the moment
When we release our cling
And drop to fertile ground
Carrying the vine of Christ forward.
Begetting new fruit.
Never far our mother vine,
Christ Jesus, our Lord.
The seeds that became us
Beget seeds from us
Nourished by His grace
And His mercies
To grow into new vines
Spreading the word
To a weary world.
The light of Christ's Vine
Begets fruit,
Begets seed,
Begets Vine.

Rev Walt

Jerry McGuairt's son, Chris, and Chris' brother-in-law, were kind enough to come help us with our limb issue regarding the large oak tree in front of the church office. The following morning, on my way into the office, I admired their work and the excellent job they had done. We are so very grateful for their help. It was probably because I was looking at that gorgeous tree that I happened to note the that about halfway up, a branch had broken off. This was not the result of removing the branch from the roof, but probably occurred during that long winter storm that we had. The branch was obviously dead. The brown, dead leaves were in contrast all the green leave of the rest of the tree.

Now, one could say the storm killed the branch, but even if the storm was the cause of the breaking of the branch, that wasn't really the cause of the death of the branch. The actual reason that the branch had died was not because of the damage from the storm, but the fact that because of the damage, the branch had lost its symbiotic relationship with the rest of the tree. In other words, it could no longer receive the water and nutrients that it needed to thrive, and it could no longer produce the chlorophyll that the tree needed in return. The relationship needed to keep the branch alive and thriving, no longer existed. And so, it withered away, dead among all the other branches that were thriving around it.

There are branches that break and survive such consequences, as long as the relationship continues to exist. There are branches that die because the tree can

no longer sustain them. In those cases, it is the tree that severs the relationship. But, as long as the tree nourishes the branch and branch nourishes the tree, both the branch and the tree will thrive. And through this thriving relationship, fruit and seeds are formed to create new trees.

Christ talks about vines a lot in the new testament. He uses vines to illustrate the nature of our relationship with Him and with God. He pictures God as the gardener and Himself as the vine. And as the analogy progresses, He teaches us that we are a branch or a piece of fruit on that vine. That without our clinging to the vine until we are ripe, we cannot remain viable.

John 15:1-2 says

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.”

And John 15:5-6

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.

Over at the parsonage, beside the carport, are two grape vines. When I first got here, they were terribly overgrown. I managed to cut a lot of the undergrowth in the spring. Last summer we had some grapes on the vines. They were not large, but still, there was fruit. But about that time, I started to get sick and was unable to keep the weeds and other vines from growing back or to keep the grapevines watered properly. So, the grapes went away. Some were eaten by birds. The rest just shriveled up. I was afraid that we might have lost the vines this last winter, but, to my amazement, they survived the snow and ice and started to come back out last month. I am back to trying to care for them and have cut a lot of the underbrush away. I keep them watered. I am hoping that we will see more grapes this year. I am also going to prune back the pecan trees and see if we can get a consistent yield from them as well.

I tell you this, not because I have a desire to have a glorious vineyard or compete in the pecan market, but because I want you to visualize the analogy that Christ has given to us. When the grapevines were being taken care of, they bore fruit. When they weren't, the fruit disappeared.

When we cling to Christ, He will nourish us and we will thrive, even to the point of providing seeds that will help the vineyard grow. When we decide we don't need the nourishment of Christ in our life by not reading His word or allowing Him to work through us, rather than ripen to maturity, we tend to wither on the vine and

produce no viable seed. I almost feel that God built this analogy into creation just so Jesus could speak to us in a way that would example our relationships with Him and each other.

I want you to think back. At some point in your life, someone under God's influence and guidance, planted a seed within you. A seed bearing the distinctive marks and flavors of being a child of God. A seed that thrived and grew within you so that you could thrive as a Christian and bear new fruit for the kingdom of God.

I want to relate to you another story which we find in Mark 11. It is actually split into two parts and unlike many of Jesus' stories, it isn't a parable, but a practical example of what we are talking about.

In Mark 11:12-14, Mark tells us that this happened:

12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again."

And his disciples heard him say it.

This is followed by Jesus driving the merchants out of the temple courts, the anger of the chief priests and Jesus and His disciples leaving the city. And we pick up our fig tree story again with verses 20-21.

20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

Now, I do not want to mislead you here, but I do want you to look deep at this example that is set. In verse 22-23 Jesus responds to Peter in a way that we don't expect:

22 “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.

23 “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.

Jesus uses Peter's awe that the plant withered to teach a lesson about faith. But I want to take the story and embed it into what we are talking about today.

I do want you to ask yourselves a couple of questions. In the story, Jesus is hungry and goes over to look for figs on a fig tree, even though he knows that it isn't the season for figs. And when He sees there are no figs he curses the tree and says: **"May no one ever eat fruit from you again."** And when Jesus comes back by the tree, the disciples are amazed to find that the tree has withered from the roots.

The tree had failed to meet His needs so Jesus ensured that the tree would never meet anyone's needs. What if instead of cursing the tree, Jesus had commanded it to bear fruit out of season? He could have done that, couldn't He? Wouldn't that have been just as much of a miracle? Just as easily as He could move a mountain. But, instead, He chose to remove the viability of the tree.

Please do not misunderstand this. This is not a reference to salvation, which is a promise from God that cannot and will not be broken. It is about viability as a Christian. Christ does not take away our salvation when we do not produce fruit.

But what He can and often does, is remove our gifts. Gifts of the spirit. Gifts of joy. Gifts of outreach. The gift of being allowed to ripen on the vine. Christians who are allowing themselves to be constantly nourished by Christ will produce fruit. If we are not availing ourselves of that nourishment through study, worship,

and outreach, we cannot produce fruit. And the fruit of Christ is always in season. As Matthew tells us in chapter 9:37-38:

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

The questions that we have to ask ourselves are:

Is the harvest plentiful because we are doing our part?

Are we clinging to the vine and letting Jesus nourish us so that we can produce more fruit?

Or are we keeping our distance from Christ, watching Him curse vines that are not producing and hoping we aren't next?

The truth is, we do not have to wait for the gardener to cut us off or cause us to wither. We can see it happening to us because we often sacrifice our promise of joy on the altar of security and pride. We often believe that our place on the vine is a one-way interaction where Jesus holds us in place.

But Jesus implies that we have to want to be there. That we must feel a need to cling to him everyday, just like he clings to us. It is a symbiotic relationship in its

simplest form. I want you to know that Jesus is not going to wither if we don't cling to him, but the growth of His kingdom is slowed by our non-participation. However, WE will wither if we choose to let go. We need for Jesus to feed and nourish us constantly. We can't count on His blessing if we don't partake of His nourishment for our lives.

For some reason, we are also somewhat Pharisaical in our approach to Christian horticulture, neat rows of plants rooted in the science of soil sampling and proper technique to ensure the greatest yield. But God is all about quality, not quantity. Great numbers are not near as sweet to God and healthy, thriving spirits.

The best tasting fruit that I have enjoyed in my entire life came from wild plum trees, unplanted but found growing amidst dissimilar trees, bushes, and grasses. They are so difficult to pick, the trees often covered with thorns, but have a flavor not found in plums that we find in bins at the grocery store. And wild dewberries that grow wild along the fences in east Texas. Somewhere between a blackberry and a raspberry but juicier and sweeter than either one. Again, not found in the supermarket.

Jesus was a rebel. He was a good Jew, but he sought to change a system that oppressed believers. The Jewish leaders despised His non-conformity with the

religious horticulture of His time. And yet, with just twelve pieces of wild grown fruit, fruit that became new vines based in His teachings, He changed the world.

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.

There is simply no way to create a new vine, grown in the truth of Jesus Christ, without clinging to the vine of His love and grace. Jesus must always be a part of our growth process as we seek to be the fruit the Great Gardener will use to expand His Kingdom. His promise is to nourish and feed us as we cling to the vine of Jesus. It is through that clinging that we ripen in the spirit to bring new growth to the Kingdom of God.

AMEN

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