

The Parable of The Vine

By Mary Kane

According to the Greek and Hebrew definitions, a parable is "a placing of one thing beside another, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, sentences with ethical wisdom and a comparison of one thing to another."

Please read John 15:1-8

What are the main symbols in this parable and whom do they represent?

Jesus is the vine—He supplies the branches with nourishment; God is the vinedresser—He labors over the branches; and we are the branches—pruned by the Vinedresser and dependent on the Vine for life.

In verse 1, how is the vine described?

The vine is described as being the *true vine*. The word used for *true* in this passage transliterates from the Greek as *alethinos*, which means true, veracious, and sincere. Our relationship to God through Jesus Christ is aptly illustrated by the relationship of the branch to the vine. Please consider the following quote from Blue Letter Bible concerning *alethinos*, "that which has not only the name and resemblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name, in every respect corresponding to the idea signified by the name." In every respect, the relationship of the branch to the vine mirrors the believer's relationship to God—completely dependent and reliant. Without the Vine,

the branch cannot have life because He is the way, the truth, and the life.

What else does the phrase *true vine* insinuate?

The phrase *true vine* insinuates that there are false vines—faulty corrupt vines that promise life but deliver death. Like poison ivy vines that eventually choke the trees they encircle, so false beliefs choke the minds and hearts of people.

Please turn to Deuteronomy 32 and read verses 32-33. What kind of vine is described in these verses?

What words are used to describe the kind of fruit that comes from this vine?

Venom, bitter, and cruel poison. The verses say that the grapes of this vine are poisonous, and the clusters are bitter. Have you ever bought grapes— frosty, cold and firm and fondly anticipated eating them only to find that they were sour? That is how we will find the fruit of any other vine than the True Vine— sour, bitter and poisonous to our souls.

According to John 15:2, what are branches meant to do?

They are *meant* to bear fruit. Just as trees and vines are created to bear fruit, so are Christians. God does not intend for us just to be Christians any more than a farmer intends for an apple tree just to be a tree; both are meant to produce fruit. Every Midwestern girl living in the “fruit belt” knows that in order for fruit trees to produce a bountiful harvest, weather conditions must be just right. Midwestern fruit trees need a combination of warm and cool weather in their proper seasons to ensure a bountiful harvest. Christians also need a careful mix of experiences, conditions and circumstances in their proper seasons to encourage growth. God, the Master Gardener, coordinates hardships, victories, challenges and encouragement in their proper seasons to produce fruit in the lives of His children.

Please read John 15:2 again.

The word used for *bear* in this passage is *phero* which means “to carry, to carry a burden, to endure the rigor of a thing, to bring forth or produce.” All of these definitions contain a common element: work. Fruitfulness on our part will not happen unless we cooperate with God and put forth effort and energy. Thankfully, God will supply the energy we need through the Holy Spirit to produce fruit.

What are some things we can do to bring about fruitfulness in our lives?

- 1. Sow some seeds.** In order to produce fruit, we must first plant the seed of God’s word in the soil of our hearts. Start memorizing scripture, and acting upon what it commands.

2. Pull some weeds. We need room in the garden of our heart for God's Word to root, grow, and bloom, therefore we must pull out the weeds of sinful activities, thoughts and habits.

3. Pour on water. Jesus is the Living Water. Make sure you are watered with His wisdom by spending time in His Presence through prayer, worship and the study of His Word.

4. Let in the light. Shine the light of God's Word into every area of your life to expose unfruitful branches for pruning and to encourage new growth in healthy shoots.

Think of fruit for a moment...what is it like?... how is it useful? Fruit provides nourishment, it tastes sweet, it looks pleasant to the eye, and we need to partake of it on a daily basis. The Greek word for *fruit* used in this passage is *karpos* which means "the fruit of vine, field or tree; a work, act, deed, effect or result." From this definition then we can deduce that we are meant to yield fruit, and affect the people around us. Now, thinking about what we have learned about fruit and how it is produced, please fill in the equation below:

JESUS + FAITH= _____

JESUS + FAITH= FRUIT.

Who benefits when a tree produces fruit?

The tree isn't the main beneficiary—others benefit from it. I believe this applies to people as well. When we live our lives for Christ and invest ourselves in good works, others will be nourished and grow in their walk with the Lord. We too will profit from living for Christ, but the main purpose of producing fruit is to benefit others.

Aside from meaning "a work, act, deed, effect or result," *karpos* also means "to bring souls to salvation." Part of our fruit bearing is to bring others to Christ.

With whom have you shared your faith lately?

If you haven't recently had an opportunity to share your faith, ask God to bring you "divine appointments." Because it is God's will for you to share your faith, He will certainly answer your prayer request. In anticipation of God answering your request, please prepare a short commentary on what Jesus has done for you and how you became a Christian. Be sure to include appropriate Scriptures in your testimony.

Look back at John 13 for a moment. What significant event is about to happen?

Jesus is about to be crucified. The fact that Jesus delivers the teaching of The True Vine to His disciples hours before His death is significant. Last words are always momentous. When my children were young and I was leaving them for a short vacation, or now when they are departing from me, the "last things" I tell my sons are important. I want them to know how to conduct themselves in my absence, how to stay safe, what to do in emergencies, and how to contact

me. The last thing I tell them is how much I love them. In essence, through the Parable of the Vine, Jesus is telling His loved ones important "last things"; how to conduct themselves in His absence, how to stay safe, what to do in emergencies, how to contact Him and finally, that He loves them.

Please look at verse 2 again. What happens to every branch that does not bear fruit?

The NKJV states that every branch that does not bear fruit is *taken up*. The Greek word for *taken up* is *airo*, which means "to raise, to elevate, to lift up, to raise up from the ground, to remove, to move from its place." I have read that vineyard owners, when they find a branch that is lying on the ground, will lift up the branch from the ground so it will again become fruitful. Some scholars, therefore, believe that verse 2 applies to unfruitful Christians; God will "lift them up" in order to make them fruitful. Other scholars believe that verse 2 refers to unbelievers who will be "cut off" because they refuse to believe and therefore are unfruitful. Regardless of which school of thought is correct concerning this portion of scripture, both outcomes are viable; the true branches will be made fruitful and the dead branches will be cut off.

Looking back at verse 2, what happens to every branch that does bear fruit?

It will be pruned. Ouch. Anyone who gardens recognizes that the secret to pruning is knowing exactly *where* and *when* to prune a plant. Cut too deeply or in the wrong season and the plant will not yield fruit. Aren't you glad that God is a

Master Gardener? He knows precisely how and when to prune for maximum fruitfulness. Please remember that the pain of pruning will be worth the bountiful harvest that is sure to follow.

Kathairo, the Greek word used for *prune* in this verse, means, “to cleanse from filth and impurities, to cut off useless shoots, to get rid of guilt.” If we are connected to Christ, the true vine, we will be fruitful. But God is not satisfied with just fruit—He wants us to be *more* fruitful, and as our definition indicates, He will accomplish this task by cleansing us in three ways:

- **First, by working to rid us of guilt and shame.** Nothing will sap fruit-producing energy like a heavy load of guilt and shame. Hebrews 10:22 instructs us to “draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Don’t hide your shame, draw near to God and ask Him to clear your mind of guilt and shame. Live in the freedom He died to secure for you and me. It is finished.
- **Second, by working relentlessly to prune us of filthy sinful habits, attitudes and influences.** All the time and energy that used to be spent in indulging the flesh will be available for producing fruit. Imagine how fruitful our lives would be if we invested as much time studying God’s Word as we did in watching TV, Facebooking or texting.
- **Third, by working persistently to prune us from useless “shoots” of activity that drain our energy, waste our time and decrease our ability to produce healthy fruit.** When we allow God to prune our activities, we will become more fruitful as He simplifies our lives and redirects our energy to works

He prepared for us to do before He laid the foundations of the earth.

At this point in your life, which of the above do you need God to prune from your life?

What changes do you need to make now?

Now, please go back and read verse 3.

At first glance, verse three does not seem to fit in with the fruitful vine parable. A quick look at the Greek used in this verse will prove otherwise. *Kathario*, the word used for *prunes* in verse 2, is derived from *katharos* which is the Greek word used for *clean* in verse 3. Realizing that *prunes* and *clean* are closely linked Greek words helps to make sense of verse 3. *Katharos* means "clean, pure, to purify by fire, free from corrupt desire, sin and guilt, unstained with the guilt of anything." The type of cleanness/pruning of verse 2 is not the type of cleanness that comes upon a person at the time of salvation. Consider the following quote from BLB as it pertains to *clean* in verse 3: "he whose inmost nature has been renovated and does not need radical renewal, but only to be cleansed from every fault in which he may fall through intercourse with the unrenewed world." To help illustrate "katharos cleaning," let's consider for a moment my parable-like china cabinet and buffet.

Many years ago my husband and I inherited a battered china cabinet and buffet from his grandmother. The finish was marred and scratched and the veneer was bubbled and peeled. My husband spent many hours restoring, refinishing

and repairing the art deco furniture. The results were amazing. What was once ugly and unusable is now beautiful and graceful. Since my buffet and china cabinet have been completely *cleaned* and *purified*, they now only need a weekly (or monthly!) dusting; my husband does not have to re-restore them every week. This is the same concept we see Jesus presenting in verse 3. The purpose of cleaning/pruning is not of salvation but fruit production— the Master Gardener prunes/cleans us of sin and busyness so we can become more fruitful.

We must pause a moment to consider another important word from verse 2, "...every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear *more* fruit (emphasis mine)." Like the branch in the verse, Christ wants us to produce *more* fruit as well. The word *more* (*pleiōn*) refers not only to *quantity* but also to *quality*. So the idea is not only to produce *more* fruit but to produce *more excellent* fruit, too.

Please name an area in your life in which you are fruitful.

What can you do to produce *pleiōn* fruitful in this area? In other words, how can you produce *more* fruit and how can you produce fruit that is *more excellent*?

Now please fill in the equation below:

FAITH IN CHRIST + PRUNING = -

Faith in Christ + Pruning = More fruit

Please read verse 4 again. Write the first word from verse 4 on the line: _____.

Most likely you recorded the word *abide* or *remain*. Please count how many times the word *abide* appears in John 15:1-8 and write the number in the space provided. _____

Abiding is an important concept to Jesus. *Abide* means "to continue to be present." Accepting Christ as Savior is a *one time* decision, but in order to *abide* in Christ we must be continually in His presence. I am very glad that Christ *continues to be present* in me regardless of how I often I forget to be continually in His Presence. There is a connection between His Presence and fruitfulness. The size of our harvest is completely dependent upon the amount of time we spend in His Presence.

Jesus says, "Abide in me and I in you." As New Testament Christian, we are used to the idea of Jesus abiding in us. But remember, Jesus presented this parable before the Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Christ abiding in the physical temple of a believer is a brand new concept for Jesus' disciples.

If you are a born again believer, how do feel about the Holy Spirit living within you?

Now please read verse 5 again and fill the missing word from this verse:

**"...he who abides in Me and I in him, bears
_____fruit."**

The missing word is *much*. Fruit...*more* fruit...*much* fruit. The word *much* in the original language means what you think, "many, numerous, a multitude, of the mode and degree of an action."

Now, please finish the following equation:

FAITH IN CHRIST + PRUNING + ABIDING =

Faith in Christ + Pruning + Abiding = Much Fruit.

As we abide in Christ and allow the Vinedresser to prune our lives we will become more fruitful.

Please read verse 6 again. What happens to those who refuse to believe in Christ?

They are cast out, withered and burned. As I write this study, it is fall in the north. Leaves and branches are strewn about my lawn. Because these branches are no longer connected to a tree, they are no longer viable. In a few days my husband will gather the branches and sticks and they will be taken to the mulch heap. Disconnected from the tree, these branches are lifeless and useless. Let us guard against becoming like these branches by staying connected to God so that we may remain productive, fruitful and abundantly full of life.

What can we do apart from Christ?

Nothing. Before I came to be a believer in Christ, my life was empty and my soul was full of nothingness. My emptiness haunted me day and night. Apart from Christ, the book of Romans states that even my good works amounted to nothing; as a matter of fact they counted as a debt against me. I truly was nothing. But on that wonderful day,

when I accepted God's call to abide in Him, I found life, peace and purpose.

Please read verse 7 again and fill in the blanks for the following equation:

Abiding in _____ + abiding in _____ = answered prayers

Abiding in Christ + abiding in His Word = answered prayers.

Please realize that as you abide in Christ, His desires will become your desires. God's answers to the desires of Christ are "yes and amen."

According to verse 8, what happens when we bear much fruit?

When we bear *much* fruit (not just *fruit*) God is glorified.

How is God glorified by our bearing much fruit?

What is a prerequisite for bearing much fruit according to verse 8?

In order to bear much fruit, it is not enough to be a believer in Christ; we must also become a *disciple* of Christ. The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word *manthetes*, which means "pupil, learner, one who follows another's teaching." *Manthetes* is derived from the root word *manthano*, which

translates “to hear, to be informed, to learn by use and practice, to be in the habit of.”

Think about Jesus’ disciples of the New Testament. What set them apart from other believers?

Looking back to the definition of *manthetes*, are you *in the habit of* Jesus? Do you put yourself in a position to *hear* from Jesus? Do you learn about Jesus by putting to *use* what you’ve discovered in your Quiet Time?

Are you a believer of Christ or a disciple of Christ?

If you consider yourself to be a believer in Christ, what can you do to become a disciple of Christ?

In closing, please read the following verse silently. Now, please read it aloud, emphasizing the words *I*, *Me*, and replacing the pronouns *you* and *your* with your name. Now please highlight or circle all the verbs (action words) in verse 16.

*“You did not choose Me,
but I chose you and appointed you,
that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should
remain,
that whatever you ask the Father in my name He may give
you.”*

John 15:16

You have been *chosen* and *appointed* by God to bear fruit that will last forever. Abide in Jesus and the truth of His Word and await your harvest.

By Mary Kane
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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *parabolē* (Strong's 3850)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 16 Aug 2010.
< [http:// www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?
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