

## “Moment By Moment” (John 15:1–11)

My wife Lori enjoys gardening. Over the years, she has planted all kinds of fruits and vegetables. As an observer, I can tell you there is a science and an art to what she does. She must cultivate the soil, plant the seeds, and nurture the crops. Yet, no matter how well Lori does, she can lose a crop to spring rains that rot the seed, slugs that eat new shoots, and deer that devour everything. She may even lose a crop because of a sudden burst of extreme heat. (I know this can seem unlikely in Washington State, but it does happen.) On account of all of these variables, Lori never knows whether her garden will be fruitful or not.

Do you ever feel this way in your daily life? You work hard at your job, yet there’s no guarantee that you will succeed. You may get demoted or even lose your job. You work hard at being a godly spouse, yet your marriage is mediocre or filled with grief. You work hard at raising godly children, yet your children are lukewarm or even rebellious. You work hard at your ministry, yet you always lack volunteers or feel discouraged. You work hard with your finances, yet, your portfolio may still plummet or the American dollar may become worthless. You work hard to stay physically fit, yet there is no guarantee that you’ll be able to keep the weight off or avoid cancer or Parkinson’s. These scenarios can all be incredibly discouraging. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a guarantee of success in your life? Wouldn’t it be great to know that there’s at least one area that you can count on?

In John 15:1–11, Jesus states that if you abide in Him you’ll experience spiritual success. It’s guaranteed! So the only pursuit in your life that is guaranteed, the only area that you can truly count on is your relationship with Jesus Christ. Fortunately, there’s no greater measure of success than to succeed where it matters most. In these eleven verses, Jesus teaches His disciples the spiritual art of fruit bearing, which is the purpose of our earthly existence and the definition of spiritual success.<sup>1</sup> The key to fruit bearing is found in the theme of abiding in Jesus. In this context, “abide” means to stay, remain, or continue with Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Back in 1982 when I was eleven years old, one of my favorite songs was “Should I Stay or Should I Go” by a punk band called The Clash. This song dealt with the pros and cons of remaining in a romantic relationship. In John 15, Jesus beat The Clash to the punch line: *Be sure to stay as you go*. In other words, you and I must go and be Jesus’ disciples, but we must also stay in fellowship with Him at all times.

Jesus is in the final evening of His life. He has been sharing with His disciples what matters most to Him. Jesus and His disciples are walking by torch light toward the garden of Gethsemane (cf. 14:31). Jesus most likely leads His disciples into a vineyard outside the city walls. There, Jesus pauses and says, “**I am<sup>3</sup> the true vine**” (15:1a). Notice He doesn’t say, “I am *a* true vine.” He says, “I am *the* true vine.” Jesus is saying there is only one true vine. You can’t choose your vintage. It’s not a wine tasting to see which variety you prefer.<sup>4</sup> Jesus often used a grapevine to describe the nation of Israel.<sup>5</sup> The Old Testament writers also used the term “vine” to describe Israel.<sup>6</sup> But it was used to denote her sinfulness, not her fruitfulness. They were sour grapes. Here, Jesus uses the figure of the vine to remind Israel of her past failures and to indicate that He is the one faithful Israelite—the “true vine.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Israel, Jesus is saying: I will be the one true source of rich and deep blessing.

In keeping with the viticulture (i.e., grape growing) metaphor, Jesus rightly assumes that no vine will produce good fruit unless someone competent cares for it. So Jesus states, “**My Father is the vinedresser**”<sup>8</sup> (15:1b). The original disciples, and you and I, have the world’s greatest vinedresser—God the Father. He’s the one who cares for vines that are connected to Jesus. In John’s gospel, Jesus is never portrayed as independent from His Father; rather, the Father and Son are always cooperating with one another in every activity (cf. 5:19–23). If this is true of Jesus, the Son of God, how much more so should this be true of you and me? In the various areas of your life, are you dependent upon God the Father and God the Son? Who is in control of your family relationships, your ministry, your work, your health, and your finances? Who bears the overall responsibility for their success or failure?

In 15:2a Jesus says, **“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit [i.e., have love for other believers],<sup>9</sup> He takes away.”** Jesus’ disciples are branches connected to the “true vine” and cared for by the master “vinedresser.” The phrase “in Me” is used sixteen times in John’s gospel.<sup>10</sup> In each case it refers to a life of fellowship or a unity of purpose.<sup>11</sup> In John’s gospel a person “in Me [Christ]” is always a Christian.<sup>12</sup> This also finds support in the fact that the branches of a vine share the life of the vine. Jesus is speaking of a Christian who is in fellowship with Him who is not yet producing fruit.<sup>13</sup> This may refer to a new convert or an immature or struggling believer. In any case, Jesus says that God “takes away” or “cuts off” (NIV) every branch that doesn’t bear fruit. The Greek word translated “takes away” (*airo*) can also be translated “lifts up.”<sup>14</sup> Since the focus here is fruit bearing, the rendering “lifts up” is preferred.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to understand that Jesus is teaching His disciples in the spring when vinedressers did what He describes in this verse.<sup>16</sup> Even today, if you go to any vineyard, you’ll find grapes tied to poles or posts called trellises. If the vinedresser doesn’t do this the grapes may be stepped on and smashed into grape juice! A good vinedresser will prop the vines up so that they can receive the maximum amount of sunlight possible. The vinedresser does not “cut away” (contrary to the NIV) a vine because it has no fruit but gently lifts it up to sun so it has an opportunity to bear fruit in the future.<sup>17</sup> In the same way, God’s first step is not judgment but encouragement. God encourages new believers. He answers prayers. He performs miracles. He brings someone or something into their lives to lift them up.

Jesus now mentions another type of branch, one that **“bears fruit”** (15:2b). Jesus explains that God **“prunes”** this fruit-bearing branch **“so that it may bear more fruit.”** It is important to recognize that there are two different types of pruning: the spring pruning, which takes place here, is for cleaning purposes. The fall pruning that takes place after the grapes have been harvested will be discussed in 15:6. They are not synonymous. The word for “pruning” used here is *kathairo*,<sup>18</sup> from which we get the English word “catharsis.” It means to cleanse. As it relates to viticulture, it describes cleansing the branch of insects, diseases, and parasites. This would have been the ancient equivalent of using insecticides, as is done today.<sup>19</sup> This pruning also includes cleaning or pinching off little “sucker shoots” from the branch—sprigs that draw away resources from the production of big, juicy grapes.<sup>20</sup> Left to itself, the branch will favor more leafy growth over more fruit, so the vinedresser has to prune or clean away unnecessary shoots and extraneous growth to promote even greater fruitfulness.

What does this pruning represent in the life of a believer? I believe the bugs, diseases, and unwanted sprigs represent things like bad habits, wrong thinking, unimportant activities, and lesser priorities—anything that distracts us from being completely fruitful, anything that hinders us from loving others to the fullest, the way Christ loved us. As we abide in the Vine, the Vinedresser removes these things from our lives to promote more fruit. Maybe you’re too busy. In fact, maybe your busyness is veiled selfishness. Maybe you’re packing your schedule with socially acceptable things that make you look good, all the while avoiding the harder work of loving others who are difficult to love, like your spouse or your children, or fellow believers in your church family. Maybe your busyness must be pruned. Maybe you’ve got a secret. Maybe you’ve been nursing a secret sin. Maybe it involves substance abuse, or compulsive spending, or pornography on the internet. Maybe it needs to be removed from your life. Maybe it’s a selfish drive for control in your marriage. Perhaps it’s neglect of leadership or running from conflict. Maybe it’s excessive time spent on things that count for nothing. Maybe it’s laziness or a bad attitude. The Vinedresser may want to prune any number of things from your life.

In 15:3, Jesus reminds His disciples, **“You are already clean [katharos, cf. 15:2] because of the word which I have spoken to you.”** Jesus is reiterating to His disciples that “the word” He spoke to them in chapters 13–14 cleansed them for fruit bearing. The disciples are spiritual clean, and they are ready to produce fruit. Jesus is optimistically calling them to a task. If you get a new job, you don’t sit down and say, “Ah, I’m so glad that I have a job.” That’s when the work really begins. In the same way you have been made clean to bear fruit.

Jesus continues His emphasis on fruit bearing and shares how to abide in 15:4–5: **“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”**<sup>21</sup> In 15:4–10, the word “abide” (*meno*) is used ten times in seven verses. Jesus’ first use of the verb “abide” (15:4) is an imperative. He doesn’t assume that His disciples are abiding, so He commands them to abide. The act of abiding is not true of every believer;<sup>22</sup> it’s also not true of every believer all the time. We can earn a living, raise a family, and practice generosity without abiding. It’s possible to pastor a church or serve without abiding. We must recognize that there’s a difference between work and fruit. It’s possible to perform a lot of work for Christ that isn’t necessarily fruitful. It’s also possible to do many things without Christ. It’s possible to do many things *for* Christ. However, anything of lasting value can only be done *through* Christ, by abiding in Him. This is why Jesus says we’re not called upon to produce fruit, but simply to bear it. Bearing fruit is a natural outcome of being in Christ and letting Him live His life through us. Notice the progression from “fruit” (15:2) to “more fruit” (15:2) to “much fruit” (15:5). That’s what God wants from us. A detached branch in the physical or spiritual realm can’t live on its own. *Be sure to stay as you go.*

Maybe your life is filled with stress. You’re a teenager living in a dysfunctional home and you can’t seem to find a safe haven. Or you may be a mother up to her eyeballs in children. You need a break, but you can’t seem to find one. Perhaps you’re performance driven and all you want to do is work and perform. Maybe you’re independent and it’s hard for you to rely on anyone. Regardless, if you want fruit that will last for all of eternity, you must abide in Christ. What’s the primary reason unbelievers don’t come to Christ for salvation? They don’t recognize their need. What’s the primary reason believers don’t come to Christ for sanctification? Exactly the same reason—we don’t recognize our need. When we read our Bibles without bothering to ask for God’s enlightenment, we don’t recognize our need. When we make plans and decisions without genuinely waiting to hear from God, we don’t recognize our need. Pray that the Lord will help you to abide in Jesus. *Be sure to stay as you go.*

In 15:6, Jesus mentions the consequences of not abiding: **“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”** In order to understand what Jesus is getting at here, you have to remember that this entire passage is filled with figures of speech. Jesus has been speaking metaphorically (e.g., vine, branches, fruit), so it’s not necessary to interpret terms like “thrown away,” “fire,” or “burned”<sup>23</sup> as referring to hell.<sup>24</sup> A branch that doesn’t remain attached to the vine withers, and out of necessity, is thrown away. Grapevines, in contrast to other types of wood, don’t have many uses. Their total value is that they can produce grapes. Vines don’t yield timber from which people can make other things (Ezek 15). They are good for either bearing or burning, but not for building. Similarly, a Christian who loses contact with Christ becomes useless and fruitless.<sup>25</sup> If I offered you a chewed up piece of gum that had been sitting out for several days or weeks, would you chew it? No! If you touched it at all, you would throw it into the nearest wastebasket! It would be dry, hard, and flavorless, not to mention, gross. Jesus is saying the very same thing about believers who don’t abide in Him. Your purpose in life is to bear fruit. It’s not to earn a decent living. It’s not to be a happy. It’s to abide in Christ and bear fruit. As far as God is concerned, there’s no reason for you to live, except to bear fruit. If you’re not fruitful, you are useless to Him.<sup>26</sup> He might as well just take you to heaven right now. But instead of doing that, He brings divine discipline upon useless believers. Fire is a common symbol in the Bible for God’s temporal judgment on His people.<sup>27</sup> God lights a match under us and begins to burn us with fiery trials. His purpose is to draw us back to the vine. He may use depression, loneliness, and financial trouble. We think we’re just unlucky, when in truth, God is the one burning us. God will not let the fire go out until we reattach ourselves to the vine. God takes His relationship with us very seriously, so when we stop abiding or pursuing intimacy with Him, He will do whatever it takes to get our attention, and it could get hot. When I was growing up and I misbehaved, my Dad used to tell me, “I’m going to heat up your backside.” Although it did feel like fire, the point that my father was trying to make was he was going to discipline me.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to temporal judgment, Jesus will judge believers in eternity. John 15:6 and 1 Cor 3:15 both use “fire” in connection with the judgment of believers.<sup>29</sup> Believers who do not abide in Christ or build well on the foundation of Christ will suffer loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. Thus, it matters in this life and the life to come whether or not you abide in Christ. *Be sure to stay as you go.*

In 15:7–11, we’ll discover four benefits of abiding in Jesus.

- ***Perfect prayer (15:7).*** Jesus says, **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”** Jesus is not offering a blank check for answered prayer. It is conditioned upon abiding in Him. The verb “ask” is an imperative. Jesus is not encouraging us to pray, He is commanding us to pray. The one who abides in Christ and His words will naturally pray the kind of prayer that is in line with God’s will. The context suggests that the prayers should pertain to fruit bearing and glorifying the Father. If you abide, then you can ask! It’s not the other way around. God gives His answers to those Christians who are abiding!

54% of Christian students surveyed confessed to “neglecting important areas of their life” due to spending too much time on social media sites.<sup>30</sup> Not long ago, young people were glued to their computer screens, checking e-mails and online games. Now e-mail is the new snail-mail, and few teenagers bother with it. It’s all about cell phones, texting, tweeting, and instant messaging. Studies show that the average teenager sends and receives over 2,270 text messages a month. What if we had a relationship like that with our Bibles? If we stayed in touch with God’s Word as frequently and tenaciously as we text and touch base with our friends, we’d have a much healthier spiritual life and a stronger grasp of the Bible. The best texting is studying the biblical text.<sup>31</sup> Today, will you recommit yourself to studying God’s Word and ensuring that you are abiding in Christ? Will you make Jesus the priority that He yearns to be? If so, you may see Him provide you some of the answers and assistance that you’ve been longing for.

- ***Proven discipleship (15:8).*** Jesus says, **“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”** The phrase translated “so prove to be” is only one word—“become” (*ginomai*). In producing fruit we’re becoming Christ’s disciples to an even greater degree (8:31–32). To glorify God is to show Him off and make Him look good. The “fruit” in this context refers to our love for our brothers and sisters. This is seen in the phrase “by this” in 13:35 and 15:8.<sup>32</sup> We prove to be Jesus’ disciples when we love each other.

Bearing fruit by loving believers is something that you can do the rest of your life. I have always thought golf and tennis are great sports. What I love about both of these sports is that you can play them all of your life. I’ve also observed that many times older folks can spank the younger generation in these sports. I’ve seen seventy–five year old obese men beat younger men at tennis. I know men in their eighties who are still golfing up a storm. It’s not necessarily about raw skill and athletic ability; it’s experience that counts. God wants you to take your spiritual experience in Christ and depend upon Him for everything. He wants your best years to be future. How will you show love to the body of Christ?

- ***Unlimited love (15:9–10).*** Jesus says, **“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”** Jesus has provided us a visual aid of what it means to abide—He loved the original disciples, and He loves you and me today. Here we come to the best definition of what it means to abide in the Bible—obey Jesus’ commands! There’s no abiding apart from obedience (cf. 14:15, 21, 23).

- **Full joy (15:11).**<sup>33</sup> Jesus concludes with these amazing words, **“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”** Happiness is the result of happenings; joy is the result of Jesus. Joy is an inner contentment despite one’s outer circumstances. Joy isn’t primarily an emotion, it is a conviction. It is the inner contentment of the soul that is actively responding to Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> G.K. Chesterton called this “the gigantic secret of the Christian.”<sup>35</sup> It’s important to see that joy is from Jesus, not something we have to try to drum up ourselves. Someone says, “I can’t find joy.” Jesus says: My joy is available to you, and it will make your joy full. So don’t go looking for joy; look for Jesus. Joy is found in obeying Him and bearing much fruit. If you’ve got “Jesus joy,” notify your face. You may be thinking today: There’s a difference between happiness and joy, so I don’t have to walk around with a happy face. I can just be my miserable self. No, no, no! Jesus joy ought to affect your face and body. Regardless of your circumstances, you can have joy. If Jesus could have joy as He endured the cross (Heb 12:2), you too can have joy in the midst of every circumstance in your life.

Today, Jesus wants you to recommit yourself to abide in Him. He desires a moment by moment relationship with you. Will you submit yourself to Him? Will you say, “Jesus, I’m inadequate, incompetent, inferior, and insufficient for every task. I can’t. You can. Please help!” When you call out to Jesus like this, He shows up in your life in a mighty way. *Be sure to stay as you go.*

### **Scripture References**

John 15:1–11

John 6:37–40; 10:28–29

John 8:31–32; 15:10

Luke 6:43–44

1 Corinthians 3:15

2 Timothy 2:11–13

Hebrews 12:4–11

### **Study Questions**

1. How has God “lifted me” up to bear fruit (15:2)? At what points in my Christian life have I struggled to bear fruit? Why were these seasons so difficult? How did God eventually enable me to bear more fruit? What can I learn from these situations to ensure that I remain fruitful in the future?
2. What does it mean to be “clean” (15:3) in relation to my sin? Am I confident in my salvation? Why or why not? Why is Jesus’ “word” so important to my salvation? How have I worked through doubts regarding my own salvation? What would I tell a Christian who is struggling with his or her own assurance? What Scriptures would I use to explain assurance and eternal security?
3. What does it mean to “abide” in Christ (15:4–5)? How have I been able to abide? Do I really believe that apart from Jesus I can do nothing? Why is it so easy to be self-reliant? How can I cultivate greater dependency upon Jesus?
4. How has God disciplined me in the course of my Christian life (15:6)? How did I initially respond to His chastening? What have I learned from God’s disciplining hand? How would I explain God’s discipline to others? Read Hebrews 12:4–11 and 1 Corinthians 11:27–34.
5. Which of the abiding blessings (15:7–11) have been particularly meaningful to me? In what area have I grown the most? Where do I need the most improvement? Who do I know who exudes this abiding blessing (e.g., joy, 15:11)? Will I ask this person to help me grow in this discipline?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is important to recognize that Jesus is not addressing unbelievers or even a mixed audience. He's speaking to those who have already believed in Him (see John 2:11). The context, therefore, is service rather than salvation.

<sup>2</sup> See also BDAG s.v. *meno* 1: "remain, stay."

<sup>3</sup> This is the last of Jesus' seven "I am" statements in John's gospel. In each of these statements, Jesus claims to be God. In 6:35 Jesus told hungry people, "I am the bread of life." In 8:12, Jesus told people in the darkness of their sin, "I am the light of the world." In 10:7, 11, He told people who were lost and leaderless, "I am the door of the sheep and I am the Good shepherd." In 11:25, He told those at the grave of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life." In 14:6, He told His fearful disciples who were unsure of their future, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

<sup>4</sup> The word "true" (*alethinos*) is emphasized throughout John's gospel (see 1:9; 3:33; 4:23, 37; 5:31–32; 6:32, 55; 7:18, 28; 8:13–17, 26; 10:41; 17:3; 19:35; 21:24).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matt 20:1–16; 21:23–41; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 13:6–9; 20:9–16.

<sup>6</sup> See Ps 89:9–16; Isa 5:1–7; 27:2; Jer 2:21; 12:10; Ezek 15:1–8; 17:1–21; 19:10–14; Hos 10:1–2. Cf. Matt 20:1–16; 21:23–41; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 13:6–9; 20:9–16.

<sup>7</sup> See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 513; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*. Revised edition. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 593.

<sup>8</sup> The NIV translates *geogros* as "farmer." This is what the word means but in this context, "vinedresser" is the preferred translation.

<sup>9</sup> The word "fruit" (*karpos*) occurs six times in John 15:2–8 (15:2 [thrice], 4, 5, 8). *Karpos* also occurs in 15:16 (twice). However, John only uses it elsewhere in John 4:36; 12:24; and Rev 18:14; 22:2 (twice). This gives us a clue to the theme of this text. See S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Abiding in Christ: An Exposition of John 15:1–17," *Emmaus Journal* 4.2 (Win 1995), 143. In the NT, *karpos* is often used rather specifically. It can refer to: (1) literal fruit/vegetation (Rev 22:2), (2) a human offspring (Luke 1:42), (3) the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), (4) new converts (John 4:35–38), (5) financial giving (Rom 15:28), or (6) a praise offering (Heb 13:15). In John 15, it seems natural to understand "fruit" as our love for believers (cf. John 13:34–35).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John 6:56; 10:38; 14:10 (twice), 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4 (twice), 5, 6, 7; 16:33; 17:21, 23. Other than the first occurrence (15:2), the verb *meno* always accompanies it. Thus the phrase "abide in Me" occurs five times.

<sup>11</sup> This is somewhat different from Paul's emphasis. While Paul did occasionally use the phrase "in Christ" (not "in Me") in this way, he more often used it in a forensic sense to refer to the believer's position in Christ (e.g., 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 1:7) or to organic membership in Christ's body (e.g., 1 Cor 12:13). John, however, never used the phrase in that way. For him, to be "in Christ" meant to be in communion with Him. Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis, 2001), 158.

<sup>12</sup> The Greek preposition *en* is used "to designate a close personal relation." It refers to a sphere within which some action occurs. So to abide "in" Christ means to remain in close relationship to Him.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus taught that some believers in Him don't bear fruit (cf. Luke 8:14). Fruit bearing is the normal, but not the inevitable consequence of having divine life. This is true of grapevines too. Grapevines have branches that bear fruit, but they must also have branches that presently bear no fruit but which are growing stronger so that they will bear fruit in the future. There can be genuine life without fruit in a vine, and there can be in a Christian as well. The NT teaches that God affects many positional changes in the life of every person who trusts in Jesus as Savior. Fruit is what a plant produces on the outside that other people can see and benefit from. It is the visible evidence of an inner working power.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, BDAG provides six possible categories of meaning for *airo*. The first option is: "to raise to a higher place or position, lift up, take up, pick up" (see BDAG s.v. *airo* 1). Dillow notes that *airo* is used this way in at least eight of its twenty-six occurrences in John's gospel (5:8–12 [five times]; 8:59; 10:18, 24). See also Matt 14:20; 27:32; John 1:29. See Joseph C. Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1–6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January–March 1990): 50.

<sup>15</sup> Harrison states that fallen vines were lifted into position with meticulous care and allowed to heal. R.K. Harrison, s.v. "Vine," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols. Revised ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986): 4:986. James M. Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 4:227–28. John Mitchell, the founder and beloved teacher of Multnomah University (my alma matre), wrote, "Many expositors believe verse 2 means the Lord takes the branch away in judgment. I do not accept this... The primary meaning of the Greek here is 'to raise up,' not 'to take away.' Verse two should read this way, 'Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He raises up.' What is the purpose of the husbandman? He goes through the vineyard looking for fruit. But here is a branch on the

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ground, not bearing any fruit. What does he do? Cut it off? No. He raises it up, so the sun can shine upon it, and the air can get to it. Then it will bear fruit. Some Christians don't bear fruit. What's the matter with them? They need to have the Son shining on them. When a believer is out of fellowship with God and is occupied with the things of the world, he is not bearing fruit. The husbandman must come along and lift the branch, raising it up and bringing the individual believer back into fellowship in order that he or she might bear fruit. God's purpose is to gather fruit, not render judgment." John G. Mitchell, *An Everlasting Love* (Portland: Multnomah, 1982), 286–87.

<sup>16</sup> See Gary W. Derickson, "Viticulture and John 15:1–6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996): 34–52.

<sup>17</sup> Morris writes, "We should be clear that Jesus is here referring to conditions of fruitfulness, not to eternal salvation. We should not understand the passage to mean that God will remove from the number of the saved those who are not fruitful. Eternal security is not being discussed here (see, rather, 10:28–29). Jesus is talking about the saved and about what will happen in order that they may be the most effective servants they can be." Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 516.

<sup>18</sup> Most scholars believe that there is a play on words between *airo* and *kathairo* (John 15:2). E.g., Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 515; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 450.

<sup>19</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:228.

<sup>20</sup> Radmacher & Derickson, *The Disciplemaker*, 155.

<sup>21</sup> There is a strong double negative in John 15:5b of the Greek text: "Apart from Me you can do nothing (*ou...ouden*)."

<sup>22</sup> Earlier, Jesus had presented abiding in Him (in contrast to departing from) as a real possibility for His believing disciples (cf. John 8:31–32; 15:10). He did not speak of abiding as the inevitable condition of believers. Jesus described His relationship with believers as more or less intimate depending on their love and obedience to Him (14:23–24).

<sup>23</sup> The verb that is used in John 15:6 to express the burning is not the strong intensive verb, but a weaker one. There are two words for burning that are found in the NT: one, the verb *kaio* and the other, *katakaio*. The second is an intensive word; it is not the word found here.

<sup>24</sup> "Fire" (*pur*) is quite often used figuratively in the NT (e.g., Rom 12:20; Jas 3:6; 1 Pet 1:7; Jude 23).

<sup>25</sup> Jesus used similar terminology when He spoke of tasteless salt that "is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men" (Matt 5:13).

<sup>26</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *How to Have a Whole Heart in a Broken World* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1987), 68.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Gen 19:26; Lev 10:2; Num 11:1; Deut 4:23–24; Isa 5:24; 9:19; Ezek 15:1–8; 1 Cor 3:10–15; Heb 6:7–8; 10:27; 12:28–29; Jude 23.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Evans, *Totally Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 265.

<sup>29</sup> Surprisingly, Boice writes, "Burning is not always used of hell, as the passage in 1 Corinthians about works [1 Cor 3:10–15] proves. And it is its association with the destruction of useless works rather than with the loss of salvation that is most appropriate in this passage." Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:238. Dillow writes, "It seems mere quibbling to say that since the fire in 1 Corinthians 3:15 is applied to believer's works and the fire in John 15:6 refers to the believer himself, therefore those two verses could not be referring to the same event. Paul wrote that the believer is the building and that the building is built up with various kinds of building materials and that the fire is applied to the building. The apostle obviously saw an intimate connection between the believer and his work. To apply the fire of judgment to the believer is the same as applying it to his work." Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship," 53.

<sup>30</sup> Church Leaders Intelligence Report 10/21/09.

<sup>31</sup> David Jeremiah, "66 Texts," *Today's Turning Point*, 10/22/09.

<sup>32</sup> See the excellent insights of Radmacher & Derickson, *The Disciplemaker*, 186–90.

<sup>33</sup> Joy is an evidence of true discipleship (cf. John 16:20, 21, 22, 24; 17:13). This also recalls the purpose statement of 1 John: "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete" (1:4). It would seem that this section in the Upper Room Discourse is expanded in 1 John.

<sup>34</sup> Brad McCoy, "The Secret to Joy in the Christian Life, Isn't..." (John 15:7–11), Tanglewood Bible Fellowship Sermon Notes, 9/6/2009.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *John*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), Electronic ed.