



Resolutions 3

Resolved: To Walk with Jesus

In Resolutions 2: Resolved to Find Our Purpose, we discussed that our purpose stems from our identity. As Christians we identify with Christ's death, meaning when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior it is as if we died on that Cross with Him. Our sin has been paid for through the sacrifice of Jesus who acted as our substitute to save us from punishment for our sin. When we understand our lives in light of the God of the Cross, we begin to see the purpose of our lives in a different way.

Our purpose is to serve God and glorify Him. We do this through our actions, living according to the commandments that God has set forth. It is not legalism to resolve to follow God in our actions, but rather should be an outflow of our gratitude towards the God who has given us everything. Each Christian has been given different gifts with which to serve God, and so each Christian's purpose looks a little different.

In Resolutions 3, we will talk about resolving to anchor our lives in Christ. True Christians are called to live connected to Jesus, consciously walking with him, and bearing fruit!

BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- To start, what is something good that happened to you this week? What is something cool that you learned?
- Do you have any reflections on the past week's lesson? What do you see as God's purpose for your life? What are the gifts God has given you to use?
- As we begin the lesson, what does it mean to you to 'abide with Christ?'

BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

The primary passage for today's teaching is John 15. This chapter in the Gospel of John is part of a farewell discourse that Christ delivers to His disciples before He is arrested and journeys to the Cross for execution. He wishes to remind His followers what it means to be a Christian and live connected to Christ. To do this, He uses what is called a *mashal*,¹ or a word picture.

John 15:1-11 (ESV)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

The Vine Metaphor in the Old Testament

Jesus' statement, "I am the true vine," is one of seven 'I am' passages spoken of by Jesus during this section. His picture of the vine is the last of the seven, meaning it is the final example Jesus provided to His disciples to help them understand who He was and their connection to Him. Why did Jesus choose the image of a vine to describe Himself?

The image of the vine in biblical usage goes back to the Old Testament, making it a familiar picture for Jews like the disciples who routinely dealt with grapevines in their society. In the book of Psalms, the Psalmist writes:

Psalm 80:8-13 (NKJV)

⁸ You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. ⁹ You prepared *room* for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land. ¹⁰ The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs. ¹¹ She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River. ¹² Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her *fruit*? ¹³ The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mashal>

Repeatedly in the Old Testament, the biblical writers refer to *Israel* as the vine. The vine that God has brought out of Egypt in verse 8 is none other than the Jewish people, referring back to the Exodus story. Like a vine, God has planted Israel in the land that was promised to them through their forefathers. However, the Psalmist asks a question: Why has God broken down her hedges?

Vineyard hedges protected the crop from wild animals, yet God had intentionally broken these metaphorical hedges, allowing Israel to be agitated by foreign nations. Although the Psalmist laments God's protective hand being lifted, the reason for His ceasing protection is found in the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 5:1-6 (NIV)

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ²He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³“Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.”

Once again, Israel is described as a vineyard whom God has personally cultivated, but here we receive the answer to the Psalmist's question. Despite everything God had done to ensure the vine of Israel grew into a strong root, the Jewish people yielded 'bad fruit.' As a result of their unfaithfulness, God took away the hedge and vowed to make Israel a 'wasteland.'

During the Passover meal in Israel, God's goodness and righteousness were represented by what the vine had produced, or the fruit.² In the same way, Israel's goodness and righteousness were measured via the fruit it produced. Unfortunately, as we see time and again throughout the biblical narratives in the Old Testament, Israel proved lacking in its devotion to their Lord leading to devastating consequences.

Jesus, by contrast, is not just *a* vine, but the *true* vine. Many in Israel believed that because they were biologically descended from Abraham, the common ancestor of the Jewish people, that they shared in the covenant blessings that God promised to their forefathers. However, Jesus made it clear that one could not simply abide in the vine of Israel and be saved. Speaking to the Pharisees about their ancestors, Jesus said:

John 8:39-41 (NIV)

“If you were Abraham's children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹You are doing the works of your own father.”

² <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/jesus-christ/what-does-it-mean-that-jesus-is-the-true-vine-john-151.html>

Here is Jesus' point: just because a Jew is born into the nation of Israel does not mean that they are a follower of God. Even though a Jew might be physically related to the likes of Abraham, it is more important that they do what Abraham did and follow God for themselves. Without bearing this fruit, they could not be considered a son or daughter of Abraham. In other words, they were not the true Israel.

Rather than rely on their connection to the vine of Israel, the Jews were to look their connection to the true vine of Jesus. If they abide in the vine of Jesus and bear fruit, then they are saved. Israel took for granted their privileged position as the chosen people of God and fell away from the true vine. Jesus encourages us not to look to our ancestry or the decisions those in the past have made for our salvific assurance, but to remain in Him.

How Do We Live Connected to Jesus?

1. Connecting to Jesus Leads to Fruit

In the same way that Israel's relationship with God could be measured via their ability to bear fruit, Christians who are truly connected to Jesus can know how strongly they abide in Him by the fruit they individually produce. This is because the *very nature of connecting with Jesus leads to fruit*.

We've alluded to it already in our discussion, but what exactly is fruit? It's the overflow of living next to Christ. It is loving what Christ loves. It is hating what Christ hates. It is doing what Christ says. It is living for Christ and not for yourself. Paul provides a concrete list of spiritual fruit we can point to as proof of God working in our lives:

Galatians 5:22-24 (NIV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Fruit of the Spirit is what a true Christian should be producing. Remember that fruit is not superficial. Fruit is a descriptor of the overflow of God in your life and so it is who you *are*. It is not simply what you look like on the outside. Judas was a disciple of Jesus and looked like a real follower, but in the end his fruit did not bear this out. Israel was God's expressly chosen people, yet they were cut off. Being a follower of Jesus in title alone does not mean you are connected to the vine in the same way that being an ethnic Jew does not make you a part of Israel. Your actions count more than your identification. In other words,

“Fruitfulness is the infallible mark of a true Christian.”

- D.A. Carson

If you do not have fruit in your life, you should not believe you are a Christian. It is not fruit that saves you, but fruit is the unavoidable byproduct of a relationship with Jesus.

2. Connecting to Jesus Requires Pruning

Jesus explained to the disciples that connection to the true vine, to Christ, requires pruning. The disciples would have understood this language given their knowledge of grapevines. The vines were tended and cared for maximum fruit. This involved four operations:

1. The removal of the growing tips of vigorous shoots so that they would not grow too rapidly
2. Cutting off one or two feet from the end of growing shoots to prevent entire shoots being snapped off by the wind
3. The removal of some flower or grape clusters so that those left could produce more and better-quality fruit
4. The removal of suckers that arose from below the ground or from the trunk and main branches so that the strength of the vine was not tapped by the suckers³

If you are connected to Jesus, He will work in your life to pull out what should not be there and to put in what should be there in order that you might be the most fruitful Christian possible. Primarily, we should understand this to be the removal of what is not beneficial in our walk with God and God's moving in our lives to put us in a position where we can experience Him most fully.

This is not always a fun or easy experience. Pruning is difficult because it often feels like discipline, the hard hand of God in our lives shaping things as a parent does for their child. Regarding pruning, or the discipline of the Lord, the author of the book of Job says this:

Job 5:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. ¹⁸ For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole.

Pruning is the discipline of God as our Father, and though not particularly enjoyable, is a good Father caring for us. If He did not love us, He would not correct us when we do wrong. If He did not love us, He would not push us to be better. As children, we see the discipline of our parents as painful and cruel. Hopefully, as we grow older, we begin to see how the lessons of our parents and the boundaries they set for us made us better people and prepared us for life ahead. A parent will love their child regardless of their actions but will strive to ensure their child grows. A Christian cannot grow if they are not willing to allow God to correct them nor if they will not cease certain behaviors or actions that are sinful.

Jesus says that anyone who does not abide in Him is thrown away and cut off from the vine. The writer of the book of Hebrews provides a similar warning:

Hebrews 6:7-8 (ESV)

³ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 310–311.

⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Good branches are trimmed to make them better. Bad branches are altogether cut off from the vine. A failure to turn from sin, be corrected by God and pruned, points to an untrue faith in Jesus. This person runs the risk of being cut off from the vine.

3. Connecting to Jesus is More than a Moment

When Christ reminds the disciples of what it means to be followers of Him, He does not provide them with a checklist of things to do or not do. Instead, He calls them to be *close* to Him. Specifically, Jesus says to *abide* in Him. To abide means to ‘remain with, in, or connected to.’ This is not so much an activity as it is a state of being. For disciples of Jesus, the imperative is not to do Christian activities, but to remain close to Jesus.

What does it mean to stay close with Jesus? It means the same thing that it would mean for any other relationship you have with a person in your life. Being close to someone means that you spend time with them. You live your life together with one another. You share the small moments as well as the big ones. You know more about them than most others. You love them and would do anything for them.

That is a relationship with another person here on Earth with us, but what does keeping up relationship and closeness with Jesus who is in Heaven look like?

- Live consciously holding onto Jesus – this means we actively think about Jesus. If a person is important in your life, you will naturally think about them in the daily course of your life. Does Jesus ever come to your mind without you being prompted?
- Soak in Jesus’s word – Getting to know Jesus involves reading His Word, which is the Bible. The best way to get to know a person is to talk to them, and God is inviting us to have daily conversations with Him through the scriptures. If you abide in Jesus, you will actively know things about who He is and the things He has revealed to us. Do you seek to talk with Jesus through His Word?
- Do what Jesus says – If you trust Jesus, you will do what He says. If you are close enough with Jesus to understand the good of His commandments for your life, you will live them out. You may not be close to Jesus personally if you do not abide in His commandments. Typically, you will take someone’s advice if you know them personally and know you can rely on their wisdom. It is the same thing with Jesus. Do you trust Jesus enough to consistently do what He says?

All of this culminates in a lifestyle of living connected to Jesus, not just a moment of connection. Connecting with Jesus is far more than a moment or a series of isolated moments. A true Christian is connected to Jesus 24/7 in their thoughts and actions. This is not to say that a Christian is perfect, but rather than there is a clear direction that their life is headed in that is readily apparent.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Evaluate your relationship with Jesus. Based on the teaching, do you think you truly abide in the vine that is Jesus or is the connection superficial?
- If you are a Christian, what is specific fruit that you can point to in your life?
- What areas of your life do you need to prune?