

November 15

John 15-17

Hi everyone, and welcome to the November 15th Accelerator! My name is Brian Smith and I sit on the Governing Board of Elders here at CCC. The reading begins today with, what has to be, one of my favorite New Testament scriptures—the allegory of the vine and branches.

One of the most compelling messages I ever heard preached on this topic was by Charles Stanley. Dr. Stanley is the Lead Pastor of First Baptist Church in Northern Atlanta, the President of In Touch Ministries, author of over 50 books and the Father to another mega-church Pastor Andy Stanley. While our chronological Bible uses the word “remain,” Dr. Stanley used the word out of the old King James version, which says that the branch is to “abide” in the vine. I can still hear the simple, yet profound Big Idea of his sermon, in which he said repeatedly in that Georgian accent...our job, as believers, is to simply, “abide in the vine”

This text around the vine and the branches is a communication masterpiece in which Jesus reminds us that while the Christian life may not be easy, it will never be complicated. It is as simple as remembering the branch only has one job and that is to stay connected to the tree. The branch does not decide what kind of fruit it will bear, or how many leaves it will have or what color and shape those leaves will be. All of that is determined by the tree itself. The branches just need to stay connected to the trunk.

When the pressure is on, it is very easy to lose perspective and feel somehow we have to “produce” the fruits of the Spirit - but we can't do that. We can't muster peace or joy or patience from somewhere deep inside our self. Thankfully, we don't have to. All we have to do is stay connected to Jesus and He will produce the peace and the power and the joy.

One of the things, I love about this passage is that it enables us to have a bit of a check for our own Spiritual temperature. It would serve us all well to stop and ask ourselves about the fruit in our own lives. How do we evaluate how well we're doing at “abiding in the vine?” Well, scripture provides that answer by giving us specific examples in the book of Galatians of what that fruit should look like. As we review them, I would encourage you to do a quick inventory for your own life. How much of this fruit are you seeing? What stands out as an area where the Lord may be working on you? Galatians 5 describes the fruits that come from abiding in the vine. They are Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Jesus also talks in today's reading about the sending of the Holy Spirit, and His significance in our lives. You know, there is so much “gray” area as we live out our Christian lives that I can't imagine going through it without the awesome power of His Spirit living inside me. Don't get me wrong, there are certainly “white” areas and “black” areas spelled out in God's word, but there are also the gray areas that we need

His direction—His Counsel. Which house do I buy, which job do I take, which school to go to, which person do I date, how do I handle this tension in my marriage, how do I become a better parent, how do I overcome this depression? How do I handle this addiction? These are areas that we must RELY on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

The Greek words for the Holy Spirit are translated in the KJV as Comforter and as "counselor" by the NIV. It is made up of two Greek words "para" which means "alongside" and Kalleo' which means to "call." So the Holy Spirit is literally the one who is called to the side of the believer. He will comfort Christians by testifying to Christ, by teaching them about Christ, by helping them to remember the words of Christ and the ultimate goal of glorifying Him. In doing so, He will shape our behaviors and decisions to become more like Christ's—if we let Him.

Among other things, Jesus prays specifically for unity among the believers. In separate parts of His prayer to the Father, Jesus prays that the disciples would be "one as we are one"; AND that NEW believers would be "one as we are one." This clearly underscores a couple of things. First, Jesus' claim to be one with the Father (we also see other parts of scripture where Jesus plainly says, "I and the Father are one.") His desire is for us to be in unity with God and with one another.

The importance of this unity with one another is highlighted the second time He brings it up. It is so that the world may know and understand the love that God has for them. Is there a lack of "oneness" or "unity" with another believer that you should address in your life? If so, let me encourage you to do so. The value in being at peace with fellow believers is important for too many reasons to get in to today. However, Jesus took the time to pray for it in today's passage...twice. I think that's worth taking note.

Remember the comforting scripture that encourages us by saying, "Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons and daughters of God!" As comforting as that is, it carries with it some responsibility...to abide in the vine, to bear fruit, to lean in to the Holy Spirit and to be unified with other believers.