

# REMAIN IN JESUS

John 15:1-17

Key Verse 15:5

**“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.”**

Hello. My name is Elia Lee, and I am from Cologne, Germany. Five years ago, I came to America for the first time to attend the International Summer Bible Conference at Purdue University. I remember that back then, I was feeling spiritually dry, and honestly, I didn't even want to attend the conference. But somehow, I ended up signing up. I'm glad God led me this way, because the conference ended up being one major boost in my then burned-out life of faith. And second of all, I could meet my now-wife for the first time – although I had no idea of the blessing God was already preparing for me. The fact that I am standing here and that God chose me to deliver a message based on this important passage is not to my credit. Rather, it is the fruit of prayer, joy and love through remaining in Jesus, which was rekindled in me through that conference. Today's passage will show us how remaining in Jesus will lead us to a fruitful life.

## **I. Living a fruitful life (1-10)**

Jesus uses a metaphor to illustrate the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the disciples. Verse 1 says: **“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener.”** God the Father is the gardener, and he is the one who plants the vineyard. The gardener takes care of the branches. He has one purpose and goal in mind: for the branches to bear as much fruit and the best quality of fruit as possible. Jesus says in verse 1a, **“I am the true vine,”** What does it mean? The word true means that the vine is unique, genuine, and it is THE vine God wants. The vine is the source of life.

Let's first look at the gardener's work. His main job consists of two things. Verse 2 says, **“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.”** The fruitless branches which get cut off by the gardener represent the people who deliberately refuse Jesus, just as Judas Iscariot did. Fruitful branches, on the other hand, get special care. They are trimmed, meaning that the excess parts are removed. The fruitful branches are also cleaned, meaning that the good parts are cultivated and made stronger. All of this is done with the goal of being even more fruitful. If I am connected to the true vine, Jesus, God will help me to be as fruitful as possible by pruning me. Practically, this means God takes away things that are obstacles for me. These obstacles could be a bad habit, a wrong image, thought, or perspective that I have, or sometimes even certain people from my environment whose bad influence on me is stronger at the moment than my good influence on them. God knows exactly how to prune me so that I can become more fruitful.

The gardener wants the branches to be able to bear the best grapes. In the same way God wants me to fully use my potential and the gifts he has given me. Experiencing

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pruning is certainly not always easy and can be painful. But it is best for me and necessary for my benefit, because God always has the big picture in mind and sees what I don't see. This is often something that is beyond my comprehension. However, when I am remaining in a relationship with Jesus, I can be assured of his love and good purpose for me as he prunes me.

Verses 4 and 5 say, **“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. 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.”** Remaining is a commitment. It is a conscious decision to be with Jesus and to hold on to him. Nowadays, many people don't like to commit, and they want to be free from any boundaries. Even the commitment two people make before God when they get married is no longer valued, and people widely accept this. But Jesus wants us to remain in him, which means to commit to Him. Jesus gives two reasons that show us how essential it is for us to commit to him: **“No branch can fruit by itself”** (4b), and **“If you remain in me you will bear much fruit”** (5a). We have two possibilities: Living a life that bears nothing, or living a life that bears fruit. We need to realize that we are merely branches and cannot bear fruit by ourselves. Thinking that one can live a fruitful life without Jesus is false confidence. Without Jesus, we can do nothing.

Growing up as a child in Germany, I learned one song that remains in my memory. The song is about a young boy who plucked an apple from a neighbor's tree. However, because he had a guilty conscience, he tied the apple back to the tree with a string. The apple hung together with the other apples and looked just like them. But what happened after a while? The apple began shriveling and became brown and withered. The moral of this story is that of course, a fruit that simply hangs on a string won't be hydrated by the roots. In the same way, if we do not remain in Jesus, we are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (6).

So how can we remain in Jesus? Let's look at verse 7: **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”** One way to remain in Jesus is to let his words remain in us, meaning that they are written on our hearts and become a part of us. We are in a ministry that focuses on the word of God. Sometimes we might complain: “Why do we meet each week, many people even more than once, to study the Bible? Why do we study certain passages again and again?” It is to remain in Jesus. His words are living and as powerful as ever. Jesus' words have the strength to turn a person's life around completely, to heal wounds, to convict people of their sins, to bring joy and hope through great promises, and to give meaningful advice and direction for our lives. In order for Jesus' words to remain in us, we must let God's word speak to us in a very personal way. We need God's word to have a clear foundation and clear direction in our lives. As his words remain in us, our prayers start to align with God's will, and our prayers become more effective.

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Jesus continues by saying that bearing fruit brings glory to God because it shows that we are his disciples (8). He explains in verses 9 and 10 that it is crucial for his disciples to also remain in His love. Jesus showed us love by loving us like the Father has loved him (9). This love is significantly different from what we see nowadays. Not a year goes by without dozens of romantic movies and comedies and Korean dramas that promote a certain image of love that seems desirable. People like to say in these movies or songs, "I will love you forever." In real life, we have to wake up to the fact that such love, while it might seem good at first, is only temporary and insufficient. But our desire for eternal love is real, and this can be found in the love that Jesus is talking about in God's love, divine love. God showed his love to us through Jesus Christ, who died to give us life.

But why does Jesus give love as a command (10)? Because it is not easy. Anyone can love someone who is nice and lovable (Mt 5:46-47). But Jesus wants us to love everyone, which includes that unfriendly guy in your class or that rude teacher. Loving them is so hard! But when we keep his commands, it is possible. Keeping his command is definitely not always easy, but Jesus showed us an example by obeying Father's commands. When we follow Jesus we are able to remain in his love.

## **II. The fruit that Jesus wants us to bear (11-17)**

Now we talked about living a fruitful life, but we have yet to think more deeply about what Jesus means with fruit. Fruit is the natural result and outcome of our relationship with Jesus, and it is promised. In the following verses, we can find three kinds of fruit: The fruit of prayer, the fruit of joy and the fruit of love.

**The fruit of prayer:** In verse 7 Jesus already said: "... ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Verse 16b says: "... whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you." This is a great promise! As Jesus' words remain in us and take root in us, our prayers will turn towards the will of God. And God will answer those prayers. I experienced personally how God answered my prayers once I prayed based on his words and opened my heart towards his will. I am married to the most beautiful and amazing woman God ever created. And the fact that I can be this happy to be married to her is the fruit of a lot of prayer. When I started praying for marriage, it was very vague. Honestly, I didn't have a clear idea of whom I was going to marry, when, and how. But as I read the Bible, God's word from Matthew 7:7, drew my attention, so I kept praying to find God's will.

This verse says, "**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**" God slowly but surely changed my heart and let me long for what he had prepared for me in his best interest. It wasn't about my own expectations and wishes anymore, but it was about God's time and God's way. Through prayer I received assurance that God's will was the best way for my life. I cannot tell the whole story here because there are too many incredible things God did during that time. But I can say one thing: Jesus' promise in verse 7 and 16 is true!

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**The fruit of joy:** Verse 11: **“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”** One fruit of remaining in Jesus is joy – true and complete joy! Keeping Jesus’ commands shouldn’t be a burden or a nuisance to me. A life with Jesus might sometimes look restrictive and narrowing. But this is only the case when we try to do things without remaining in Jesus. What we have to do is to really understand what it truly means to follow Jesus. Then the natural result will be true happiness and joy, and not just any joy, but COMPLETE joy. Complete joy means joy that doesn’t need anything more. Jesus is not giving us instructions to burden or pressure us, but to allow us to experience true joy!

**The fruit of love:** Verses 12-15 talk about the fruit of love. Loving others shouldn’t be forced. Loving others is the fruit of Jesus who loved us first. He wants us to love others like he loved us, and he showed us how, by laying down his life (12-13). Remaining in Jesus means to obey his commands. But at the same time, he makes clear that obeying doesn’t make us his servants but his friends (14). Jesus doesn’t talk from above but calls us friends, and he goes even further: He started to show his love first by washing his disciples’ feet. He loves us so much that he took the initiative. When we accept this amazing love in our hearts, we will be able to also love others and remain in Jesus’ love. This means to keep it and hold on to it, and to build a community of love that is different from what the world has to offer.

So how can love be one of our fruits? We can bear the fruit of love when we embrace and accept the grace that Jesus granted us through his love. And when we remain in Jesus, our heart becomes more like his heart for his people. This is how we can love our families and our communities. We can even start at this very conference and show love to one another by following Jesus’ example and taking initiative.

All of this comes from remaining in Jesus! Jesus promises us that we will bear much fruit. Bearing fruit means that our prayers will be answered, we will be able to love one another, and we will experience true and pure joy. For the first part of my life, I lived a life next to the vine but not yet connected to the vine. Some of you grew up in this or another ministry and heard about Jesus since your early years – so did I. Because my parents are missionaries in Germany, hearing about Jesus has always been a part of my life. So it might have looked like I always lived a life close to the true vine. But to me, it wasn’t obvious that my life was not the same as truly remaining in Jesus, until I got into my teenage years.

I think every so-called “2<sup>nd</sup> gen” has a phase in his or her life, when living in a Christian community seems restricting. I started asking myself: “Why am I taught that living a Christian life is so good, when it seems to mean giving things up?” From then, I would just go through the motions, doing the things that I thought were expected of me. Of course, this didn’t really satisfy me. I knew theoretically that living based on the word of God was supposed to be the best life, but I didn’t really constantly feel it.

After I graduated high school, I was planning on spending my summer in Korea. Although I wanted to enjoy my independence there, I was suggested to have Bible study

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four times a week and to write and share one testimony a week. I wasn't happy at first, but after talking to my dad, I decided to follow his suggestion to try it for one week and then see whether I wanted to continue.

I'm thankful that my father was wise in that moment and didn't push me. He helped me to open my heart towards the word of God, and the next few weeks became a totally new experience for me. For the first time in a while, I suddenly felt how the God's word waters the dry ground in my heart. I was absorbing every word that was said during the Bible study and felt so refreshed and nurtured. It changed my heart significantly within those few weeks. I renewed my relationship with Jesus and was no longer just walking next to him but made a decision to remain in him. One word in particular has remained in my heart since then. **“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel’”** (Ac 9:15). This word helps me in holding onto God's calling to proclaim God's name and to one day go to North Korea.

But remaining in Jesus was still not always easy for me. Sometimes I spent more time on Facebook than meditating on God's Word. My prayer life also often became a shallow ritual that I only practiced to ease my conscience. It's no wonder that this did not give me strength; on the contrary, it made me tired and weak. Remaining in Jesus is not just a one-time thing; it is ongoing and involves being pruned and changing towards the image of Christ. I'm still far from perfect, but I am connected to the true vine who is continuously working in me. Having a relationship with Jesus has allowed me to truly live and realize why a life with him is the best and only life.

Remaining in Jesus will make us well-nourished, strong and productive. This is the promise Jesus gives. Do you want to bear fruit, producing something that's of value and worth? Jesus says (5): **“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”**