

# 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.”**

I am from Nigeria. In Nigeria one of my favorite fruits is cocoa. From cocoa we can get delicious chocolate drinks and candies. I know you like chocolate, don't you? Fruits are very important for nutrients and vitamins to help us grow healthy and strong. But today I'm not talking about physical fruits. I want to share what Jesus teaches about spiritual fruits. Yesterday, we heard Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. In John 15 Jesus gives us the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Fruit bearing is essential for healthy branches. Jesus tells us how to remain in him and bear much fruit.

## **I. How to bear fruit in Jesus (1-10)**

Just after his last supper, Jesus gave his disciples a beautiful illustration. Let's look at verse 1. **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”** The gardener is our Father God who plants the vineyard. He watches over and cares for the vineyard so it will produce fruit. Jesus is the true vine. The vine is the life source which provides water and nutrients to the branches. The branches then grow and make flowers which bear fruit. There are many false vines through which people think they can bear fruit. Only Jesus is the true vine through whom we can bear good, lasting fruit. (Jn 1:4)

Look at verse 2. **“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 gardener takes care of his vineyard in two ways. First, he cuts off every branch that bears no fruit. Second, every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. The primary purpose of pruning is to bear good fruit. God wants us to bear good fruit. Pruning is very painful like pulling out wisdom teeth. But without pruning we cannot bear fruit.

Then how does God prune us? In verse 3 Jesus said, **“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”** The Greek translation for

# REMAIN IN JESUS

“clean” is pruned. This means that the disciples had been pruned by the word of God. Jesus cut off their bad habits, their pride and unbelief by the word of God. It was like cleansing them with water to make them holy (Eph 5:26). Jesus pruned their worldly desires and helped them to grow as spiritual men. Sometimes Jesus rebuked them and gave them practical training. In the end, God raised them up as shepherds for the world. God used them later to bring the gospel to all nations. Their three-year pruning period from Jesus was productive and fruitful.

Let's read verses 4-5. **“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.”** Jesus said, **“Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”** What does this mean?

Remaining means commitment. It's like a marriage commitment where the couple is inseparable through good and bad. Jesus showed his commitment to us by giving his life and giving us his word of life. We must commit ourselves to Jesus as well by obeying his words, then we will have a fruitful lifetime relationship with Jesus.

Jesus also said, **“No branch can bear fruit by itself.”** Fruit-bearing is not based on the work or ability of a branch. People try to bear all kinds of fruits without Jesus. People try to work hard to do something without Jesus. They are fruitless and empty no matter what their achievements in the world, when they have no relationship with Jesus. They must know that they are just branches; they cannot bear fruit by themselves. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. If we do not remain in Jesus, we are like branches which wither and are thrown away into the fire and burned.

To remain in Jesus is crucial for fruit-bearing. The word “remain” is repeated 12 times here. Remaining in Jesus is key to a close vine and branch relationship with him. Jesus promised that if we remain in him, we will bear much fruit. Bearing fruit is not an option, but God's mandate (Ge 1:28). When we bear much fruit, we can be approved as Jesus' disciples and reveal God's glory. This is only possible when we remain in Jesus.

# REMAIN IN JESUS

Then how can we remain in Jesus practically? Jesus tells us how in verses 7-10. Verse 7 says, **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.”** We can remain in Jesus and bear much fruit when Jesus’ words remain in us. Jesus’ words can remain in us when we hold his words in our hearts every day. God told the Israelites, **“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”** (Deut 6:6-7). This sounds crazy. But it urges us to have God’s words imprinted on our hearts. In UBF, we study the Bible, we have daily devotions, we write testimonies and share them, and we also teach the Bible. We want Jesus’ words to remain in us.

However, many things distract us from listening to God’s word. Sometimes we feel that we don’t need to depend on God’s word and to take it easy. We are always tempted by a lying voice to live according to our sinful nature. God’s children must hold onto God’s word in order to bear good fruit.

Now look at verses 9-10. To remain in Jesus also means to remain in his love. Jesus loved his disciples as the Father loved him. His love for his disciples was divine. His love is different than any love which we experience in this world. Human love is conditional, and it does not last forever. Love story movies are popular. Sadly, most actors can’t even keep one successful marriage, because they don’t understand the true love that is in Jesus. Only Jesus’ love is unconditional and lasts forever. The disciples had received Jesus’ love, and now they needed to remain in his love. Verse 10 tells us that to remain in his love we need to keep his commands. Keeping Jesus’ commands may seem burdensome, but it gives us true joy (11). Then what is his command? Verse 12 says, **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** Usually people don’t like commands. But Jesus himself first demonstrated this kind of love and then he commanded it. It is not easy to love one another. But we can remain in Jesus’ love when we obey his command to **“love each other.”**

I married a beautiful woman of God eight years ago. My wife knows that I love her, but still she wants me to confess daily, “temi” which means “you are mine.” Then she responds with the same. When we express our love, we grow to love all the more. When Jesus says, **“Remain in my love,”** it

# REMAIN IN JESUS

means first to receive Jesus' love in our hearts. Jesus said, **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”** (9) Jesus showed us what love is by giving his life as a ransom for us. He submitted himself absolutely to the Father's will. To remain in Jesus' love, we also submit to his will and obey his command (10).

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

What is the fruit of remaining in Jesus? There is the fruit of prayer. Verse 7b says, **“...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”** Verse 16b says, **“...so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”** When we remain in Jesus' words, we can ask whatever we wish and it will be done for us. We can live a fruitful prayer life. We can pray according to God's will, and Jesus promises that he will answer our prayers. There are many things we cannot do. We cannot even change our own lives, or others'. But when we pray, God can liberate people in Africa, Muslim countries and North Korea. Do you believe in the fruit of prayer? May we pray until God's kingdom comes to all the countries of the world.

Another good fruit is joy. In verse 11 Jesus says, **“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”** Those who remain in Jesus have complete joy. Chiaka of Nigeria UBF and her husband Barnabas went as missionaries to Ghana in 2005. Two years later, Barnabas suddenly died of sickle cell anemia. Despite her loss, she did not remain in sorrow. Now, six years later, she still joyfully serves many sister disciples, and two are growing as Bible teachers. She could bear fruit because she remained in Jesus.

Another fruit of remaining in Jesus is love (13-15). Look at verses 13-14. The greatest love Jesus showed us was to lay down his life for us. Jesus loved his disciples as his friends. Jesus' friends are those who obey his command to love one another (14). Jesus' friends enjoy the privilege of knowing the Father's business (15). In the past Peter and John were rivals. But when they accepted Jesus' love, they co-worked beautifully and powerfully in Jesus' name. Through their beautiful co-working, the great work of God was done in Acts.

# REMAIN IN JESUS

Verse 16 assures us that we will live a fruit-bearing life in Jesus. **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last...”** While we do God’s work, we must remember that we did not choose Jesus, but Jesus chose us. He chose us to bear fruit that will last. This fruit-bearing is not based on our ability or performance but on Jesus’ election.

Many people misunderstand the concept of fruit. They limit fruit to visible fruit, such as raising twelve disciples. When we do not see visible fruit, we are easily discouraged and feel useless. However, there is invisible fruit as well, the inner fruit of the Spirit, which is Christ’s character: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). When we remain in Jesus, we can bear this kind of fruit.

Missionary Peter Park loved Nigerian students so sacrificially. He has suffered so much to live as a missionary in Nigeria. He gave up his safe apartment and his job at the embassy to live with students near the campus. He lived a common life with 15 to 20 brother disciples. As a result the family had to live on limited financial resources. More than three times he was attacked by armed robbers. Despite all these difficulties, he did not return to Korea. Instead, he chose to remain in Nigeria as a missionary by holding on to his life key verse, Isaiah 49:6, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” By remaining in Jesus, his family and coworkers have borne the good fruit of raising many disciples and five shepherd families.

I was born into a Christian family with strict discipline. “You must attend all services.” “No parties. Just stay indoors and study.” Although I followed all the rules religiously, inside of me I was rebellious. I wanted to be free to live my life the way I wanted it. I was also weary of church because all I heard was sin and judgment, terror and wrath. In all, I had no understanding of God’s love. I saw God who loaded men with rules and who is ready to judge them when they sin. This thought made me timid, selfish and unforgiving.

One night I was thinking about the worth or the meaning of my life. I opened my Bible and Luke 23:34 caught my eyes. I heard Jesus cry on the cross **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”**

# REMAIN IN JESUS

For the first time in my life I realized God loved me all the while. His commands enable me to have a fruitful life. I was unfruitful because I did not accept Jesus' love and word in my heart. In 1995 God lead me to UBF where I was privileged to attend a Genesis Bible study. There I learned God's unfailing love for mankind. I also learned that the root of sin is when man doubts God's love. As I received Jesus word and love into my heart, I could overcome my fear and selfishness. God blessed me to grow as a loving shepherd to serve many Bible students. Among them, two Bible students are growing as shepherds.

Three years ago God sent my family out to pioneer the College of Medicine of the University of Lagos. I worked hard despite my busy company schedule to serve many Bible students. I wanted to raise 12 medical students as faithful disciples in a short time. So I pushed them to grow quickly. But one Bible student of over ten years left the ministry and two other growing leaders left as well. I felt a sense of failure. But through this, God pruned my worldly desires including the desire for human recognition. I also realized that God wanted me to learn how to remain in Jesus first. Above all, God gives me assurance that he will make me fruitful in raising faithful disciples of Jesus when I remain in Jesus. Praise Jesus who helps us to remain in him.

Through today's passage we have learned the importance of remaining in Jesus. Those who remain in him will bear much fruit, fruit that will last.