



What Is the Secret of the Vine?

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5, NLT)

As you read the Bible, you will be amazed at how Jesus taught such wonderful lessons from ordinary things – a shepherd and a sheepfold, a loaf of bread, a coin, a widow, etc. After celebrating the Passover Supper with his disciples, Jesus and his disciples walked from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane where his enemies would arrest him. Some think they passed a vineyard, because Jesus used the vineyard and its fruit to teach the basic secret of his life. He had said, *“Just believe I am in the Father and the Father is in me,”* (John 14:11, NLT) It would also be the secret of the lives of the disciples and other believers when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, came and made his home in them. Jesus would be in them, and they would be in him. They would rest in Jesus the vine; he would produce the fruit.

The true vine

Jesus spoke these words to his eleven true believers: *“Yes, I am the true vine, and my Father is the Gardener...Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain [abide, live, stay continually] in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit...For apart from me you can do nothing.* (John 15:1, 5b, NLT)

Jesus is the true vine. Nourishment flows from the vine to the branches. Without that nourishment, there will be no fruit. The branches growing on the plant are true Christians. God the Father is the Gardener who cares for the vine. What does a Gardener do? He cuts off dead branches, inspects for disease, insects and prunes the branches for greater fruitfulness. Isn't that a beautiful picture of God's love and care? Just as the branch gets its life from the vine, so Jesus is the source of life and strength for the Christian. Only he can produce fruit. As Paul later explains, “Christ is your real life!” (Colossians 4:3a)

The fruitful vine

If you were a gardener, what would you expect to find on the branches – much fruit? A healthy grapevine produces abundantly; a single branch of a healthy vine bears many grapes. What kind of spiritual fruit does Jesus want to produce in you? Paul says, *“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives he will produce this kind of fruit [singular] in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* (Galatians 5:22,23a, NLT) Jesus displayed all of these qualities. These are character traits or qualities produced in Christians by the Holy Spirit, not specific actions. Specific actions are something you do; fruit is the product of who you are. Only Jesus, through his Holy Spirit can produce this supernatural fruit in you.

(Read Galatians 5:19-21 to see what can happen when you depend on your own strength.) Have you ever seen a fruit struggling to be “grapey”? Neither do you have to struggle to produce joy, peace, etc. It comes from remaining in close daily fellowship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit will produce the fruit as you yield to him and allow him to be in control. Are you receiving nourishment by staying close to him, like a branch?

Did you notice that the first fruit mentioned is love? When you believe, God pours his love into you, so that you can love others with his kind of love – a love that values others and desires the best for them. Think about it. Without love, Jesus will not produce other fruit in your life.

The discovery of true fruit

Dick Woodward was pastor of a small church when he began to understand the secrets of the vine. For thirteen years, he had struggled, trying to make his church grow larger than two hundred people. He felt like a failure. One day during a serious illness of his wife things came to a crisis. Falling to the floor, he sobbed out his fears, failures and feelings of inadequacy. He cried out to God, “I can’t! I can’t!” (When have you felt that way?) He seemed to hear God say, “I’ve been waiting thirteen years to hear you say that. Now see if you can learn this: “I can!” (You do not have to wait thirteen years. Take a lesson from Dick Woodward!)

Dick learned it was okay to be inadequate and weak. The Apostle Paul had learned this, too. When he had a chronic physical problem and God refused to answer his prayer for healing, God said to him, “*My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.*” (2 Corinthians 12:9, NLT) Paul gladly boasted about his weaknesses to show how God was working through him.

When Dick quit trying to do things by his own strength, he realized the beginnings of God’s power working through him. Miracles happened. His wife got well. His church grew. He began speaking at a weekly Bible study breakfast that grew to 375 men attending. His invitation to speak on a weekly television show for six weeks extended to ten years! When confronted with challenges, he would say, “I can’t, but God can!” God did – over and over.

Just when God began to use Dick in a mighty way, his health began to fail. God called him to a smaller church. Over a period of ten years, his legs, his torso, then arms became paralyzed until he became a quadriplegic. (A person who is paralyzed in both arms and both legs.) During this time, he wrote a devotional Mini Bible course. Through that course, three billion people in twenty-seven different languages have the opportunity to hear the Gospel on the radio each day. Nothing is impossible with God! Each day Dick works for hours on his voice activated computer creating study booklets, sermons and other materials. People who visit him and his wife remark on how they overflow with real love, real joy and real peace – all the fruit of the Spirit. God has used Dick’s physical disability as a showcase for God’s ability!¹ Dick has summed up the four Spiritual Secrets he learned from John 15 this way.

I'm not, but He is,
And I am in Him,
And He is in me.

I can't, but He can,
And I am in Him,
And He is in me

I don't want to,
But He wants to,
And I am in Him,
And He is in me.

I didn't,
But he did.
And I am in Him,
And He is in me

What a beautiful story of how one man learned he could not produce fruit unless he stayed connected with the vine (Jesus). What will be your story? Will you begin learning now to receive daily nourishment through the Word and prayer? Will you set aside a special time to be with the Lord – to read his Word and to talk with him? Will you share with him as you go through the day's activities? God wants to transform you to be like his Son. As you become more like him, you, too, will be amazed at what God will do through you. Don't miss out on the great harvest God wants to produce in your life!

Attitude Check:

- What attitude do you need to have in order to “give up and let God” produce fruit in your life?

Explore:

- Read “A Disciple Abides in Christ.” (John 15:1-17)
- Read and think about the truths in John 15. What changes does God want you to make? Write in your journal one thing you learned about God.

Talking with God:

- Father, remind me to remain connected to Jesus each day so that you can produce much fruit.

¹ *The God Who Hung on the Cross*, Dois I. Rosser & Ellen Vaughn, Zondervan, pp. 63-73