

YOU ARE
THE
BRANCHES

BY J.K. MCKEE

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Our focus for this short journey through the beginning verses of John chapter fifteen will be four-fold.

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INTRODUCTION

Why do you and I exist? Why are we even here? Are we on this earth just to mark time, pursue our dreams, endure hardships and suffering? Or do we have a more critical role? Do you ever get the feeling that much of what occupies our time and energy serves little purposes beyond the short term? Look at what the great King Solomon had to say about this.

"14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit."

- Ecc 1:14 KJV

"11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all [was] vanity and vexation of spirit, and [there was] no profit under the sun. ... 15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also [is] vanity."

- Ecc 2:11, 15 KJV

Now consider his conclusion.

"13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil."

- Ecc 12:13-14 KJV

God created you and I for more than to serve ourselves. He intended His creation to please Him ultimately. That seems like such an unattainable place to achieve. So how do we get there, and how do we know when we get there? I like what we're are told in Romans 8 and verses 28-30.

"28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to [his] purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

- Rom 8:28-30 KJV (emphasis mine)

How wonderfully clear this is! "To be conformed to the image of His Son..." We are here to become like Jesus and then reproduce that process in others. Jesus called this process bearing much fruit. We are Jesus' branches to be fruitful for His glory.

We will explore four main topics in this book. In each of these four sections, I will attempt to direct your attention to one keyword or theme. I believe this will help to reinforce the material covered in these verses of Scripture. Ask God's Spirit to open your heart and mind to the truths found in His Word. Once you've done that, be prepared to act. Commit to obeying what The Lord directs you to do.

Now, let's get going and growing!

"1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every [branch] that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast [them] into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

- John 15:1-8 KJV

1.

THE HUSBANDMAN

“...MY FATHER IS THE HUSBANDMAN” - JOHN 15:1

Jesus begins this portion of His discourse by identifying the primary figures operating in His illustration. Let's look at the description, husbandman. What exactly does Jesus mean by this title?

The keyword for section one is **OWNERSHIP.**

A husbandman implies ownership, and it's the first principle of true Christianity. The owner plants, prunes, protects, and also picks the fruit. We are accountable and responsible to God.

"36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

- Mat 12:36 KJV

"23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants."

- Mat 18:23 KJV

"2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

- Luke 16:2 KJV

"12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

- Rom 14:12 KJV

"5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead."

- 1Pe 4:5 KJV

The Father planted the Son on this earth. That Son perpetuates the will of the Father through us the branches. And we must put forth fruit that the Father might be pleased. One day we will stand before our husbandman for our fruit to be scrutinized.

As a Christian, I have an owner, a master, and a Lord. He owns me!

"19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

- 1Co 6:19-20 KJV

In the Old Testament, there's a beautiful provision given for slaves who loved their masters and refused to leave.

"5 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: 6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul, and he shall serve him forever."

- Exo 21:5-6 KJV

“THE HUSBANDMAN IMPLIES OWNERSHIP”

This slave would have his body punctured as the property of his master. He would yield his legacy and name. Everything from then on would be to the credit of the master. And so it is with us as believers. We are to be crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20) and to live for the benefit of our master. The Father is our husbandman, our owner. Are you currently honoring Him with your life? Let's consider a couple more passages to reinforce this point.

"1 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: 2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. 4 What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

- Isa 5:1-4 KJV

"1 And it came to pass after these things, [that] Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which [was] in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it [is] near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; [or], if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. 3 And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

- 1Ki 21:1-3 KJV

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 5, we find The Lord asking what else could He have done for His vineyard. Yet it still failed to produce its intended fruit. How clear this illustration is! God has gone to great lengths to have a prosperous vineyard. He loved the world and gave His Son (John 3:16). So where's His fruit? Where's the product He so graciously bought?

In First Kings, chapter 21, a terrible crime is unfolding. A man named Naboth owns a vineyard. The land is his inheritance based upon God's instruction for the division of Caananland. According to God, selling or trading this property is forbidden.

Unfortunately for Naboth, his vineyard is situated right next to the palace of the wicked King of Israel, Ahab. Ahab offers to buy or trade for Naboth's land, but Naboth refuses. "The Lord forbid it me," was his response to the king. Ahab wanted the plat of ground to plant an herb garden there.

Eventually, Ahab would take possession of Naboth's inheritance through deceit and murder but would be judged by God for it. The point of all this? It was God's land and God's vineyard given to God's servant. How often we try to

take what The Lord had already purchased and turn it into an herb garden when God desires a vineyard. We try to bargain with God about what to do with our lives instead of surrendering to the owner. He's the husbandman. Let Him have possession of what's rightfully His!

2.

THE TRUE VINE

"I AM THE TRUE VINE..." - JOHN 15:1

Now we come to the subject of the true vine. Jesus makes sure we know to whom He is referring when He says, "I am the true vine."

The keyword for section two is **LEADERSHIP**.

While the husbandman implies ownership, the true vine embodies leadership. Jesus employs the imagery of a vine to explain this significant relationship. Let's break this down further.

Jesus describes Himself not as just a vine, but the true vine. Why emphasize the characteristic of being "true"? Logically, if there's something true, there must be a false vine. To what is He referring? What is the false vine? Take a look at the following passage.

"8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. 9 Thou preparedst [room] before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. 10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof [were like] the goodly cedars. 11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. 12 Why hast thou [then] broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? 13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. 14

Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; 15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch [that] thou madest strong for thyself. 16 [It is] burned with fire, [it is] cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. 17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man [whom] thou madest strong for thyself. 18 So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. 19 Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

- Psa 80:8-19 KJV

Allow me to point out several observations. First of all, in verse eight, we find that God took a vine out of Egypt and planted it. Secondly, in verse nine, a place was prepared for it. Third, it took root and spread out and had great influence. Here you begin to see the aspect of leadership. Fourth, this vine became wasted because it ceased to fulfill its intended purpose. What was that intended purpose?

Just in case you haven't realized it yet, these verses of Scripture refer to the nation of Israel as the vine.

"7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts [is] the house of Israel..."

- Isa 5:7 KJV

God delivered Israel out of Egypt, but why? For reasons known only to God, He desires to work through frail, finite creatures like us. We can do nothing without Him, and He chooses to do nothing on earth without us. After all, His original directive was for us to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). He has created and called us for His express purpose.

"27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;"

- 1Co 1:27 KJV

Unfortunately, Israel became the false vine by their unwillingness to obey The Lord. In response, Jesus states, "I am the true vine." Was Jesus an afterthought then? Was His coming only the "plan B" because of a failed "plan A?" God forbid! Redemption, salvation, atonement, and the new birth wasn't ever an emergency backup plan. It was always the plan.

"8 ... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

- Rev 13:8 KJV

"THE TRUE VINE EMBODIES LEADERSHIP"

How then do we explain this? The plan was for Christ to be the true vine all along. Israel, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the sacrifices and ceremonies, were all foreshadowing the coming Messiah. Jesus was/ is the fulfillment of all God had promised to mankind. The "true vine."

The Bible also uses the adjective true to describe Jesus as the object of several other biblical symbols.

The True Bread:

"32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. 34 Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. 35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

- John 6:32-35 KJV

The True Light:

"9 [That] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

- John 1:9 KJV

Let us return to the subject of leadership. Psalm 80 describes the vine as reaching far beyond itself and having influence that even extends into the sea. God intended Israel to be His witness in all the earth. They were supposed to testify to the One True God, yet they failed. Jesus, being the true vine, came to this earth to reconcile the world to God. That all might know Him. It's the ultimate act of leadership - lead people to The Lord. Thus Jesus embodies the most excellent example of leadership ever afforded mankind.

Notice John 15:1 starts with the words, "I am." Doesn't that seem oddly familiar? Remember The Lord's words to Moses at the burning bush? In Exodus chapter 3, Moses seems unclear as to who he is representing before the children of Israel. So God gives him an answer.

"13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, [when] I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What [is] his name? What shall I say unto them? 14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

- Exo 3:13-14 KJV

Did you notice the focus of God's answer? "I AM."

With those two words, Jesus identifies Himself with the Jehovah God of Israel. (also see, John 6, 9:5, 10:7-14, 11:25, 14:6, 11, 20) Not only that but in this opening line, He refers to "my Father." Later, the Jews condemned Jesus for stating He was the Son of God.

In John 14, Jesus makes it very clear where His leadership is taking us.

"6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. 7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. 8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou [then], Shew us the Father? 10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. 11 Believe me that I [am] in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."

- John 14:6-11 KJV

He's taking us to the Father - that's leadership!

3.

THE BRANCHES

“...YE ARE THE BRANCHES...” - JOHN 15:5

So far, we've seen:

- 1) The Father / Husbandman = OWNERSHIP
- 2) The True Vine = LEADERSHIP

We continue our study onward to the meaning of the branches. It's pretty clear what our Lord means by the idea of branches.

"5 I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

- John 15:5 KJV (emphasis mine)

The keyword for this section is DISCIPLESHIP.

You and I, the servants of the Lord, are the branches. I'm not sure there's a more magnificent illustration of the followers of Christ than this one right here. We are just branches. We, the church, are given a compelling picture of what true discipleship is. How perfectly this describes our relationship with Christ. Jesus reminds us that without Him, we can do nothing. A branch without a vine is just a dead stick. We can't

get nutrients on our own, neither can we produce fruit on our own. We are entirely dependent upon the vine.

A CONDUIT NOT A CONTAINER

Even though the Bible speaks of us as an earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4:7), God never intended for us to be an end in ourselves. It's the very reason the Dead Sea is, well, dead. It has no outlet, so it has no purpose beyond itself.

We are branches to carry forth the DNA of the vine into the desired fruit. We serve no other purpose. If the vine cannot have true expression through its branches, there's no reason to maintain the relationship.

"2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every [branch] that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ... 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast [them] into the fire, and they are burned."

- John 15:2, 6 KJV

Let us look at things from a broader perspective:

(1) The husbandman **PLANTED** the vine.

(2) The vine **PRODUCES** the fruit.

(3) The branches **PROJECT** the intended fruit.

“WITHOUT JESUS, WE CAN DO NOTHING”

Remember, the branch cannot produce anything on its own. Everything needed comes from and through the vine. The branch is only the conduit to extend the purpose of the vine. In essence, the branch exists to fulfill two primary goals.

(1) **INFLUENCE** - Jesus has enlisted us to extend His power to those around us.

(2) **INCREASE** - By extending Jesus' influence, we increase the surface area of the vine. More surface area equates to more fruit (and ultimately, much fruit) for the husbandman.

4.

MUCH FRUIT

“...THE SAME BRINGETH FORTH MUCH FRUIT...” - JOHN 15:5

Finally, let's examine this command to bear much fruit. What exactly does this imply for us as followers?

- 1) The Father / Husbandman = **OWNERSHIP**
- 2) The True Vine = **LEADERSHIP**
- 3) The Branches = **DISCIPLESHIP**

The keyword here is **WORSHIP.**

Worship? You might be asking, "Where in the world did you get that from?" Just stay with me for a moment. The fruit of a true disciple will always give glory to God. Whether it is teaching, singing, serving tables, or personal evangelism, when done for The Lord, it ascribes worth to Him. That's what worship is, worth-ship. It's the main reason to be fruitful.

Below are a few points to educate us on the need to be fruitful.

(1) GOD IS FRUITFUL

I'm not going to insert all the verses of Scripture here, but I encourage you to search Genesis chapters one and two for yourself. Consider the following actions of our Creator and how they demonstrate God's fruitfulness.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Spirit of God moved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God blessed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God said	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God formed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God divided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God planted (a garden!)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God called	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God made things to grow (and produce fruit)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God made	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God took man
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God saw	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God (put him in the garden)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God set (i.e., the sun, moon, and stars)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God took a rib (and made a woman)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God created	

I would say The Lord had a busy week or two. Now that's fruitfulness!

(2) GOD COMMANDS FRUITFULNESS

"26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

- Gen 1:26-28 KJV (emphasis mine)

"1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."

- Gen 9:1 KJV (emphasis mine)

"16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and [that] your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

- John 15:16 KJV (emphasis mine)

God created you and me in His likeness and image. If God Himself is fruitful, and He created us in His image, we must be fruitful as well. God doesn't make suggestions or brainstorm ideas to find out what's best. He commands fruitfulness.

(3) GOD DESIRES MUCH FRUIT

"Much fruit" might seem like an elusive statistic to quantify. Ultimately, I believe it means much more than just numbers.

"2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every [branch] that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ... 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

- John 15:2, 4-5 KJV

Take note of the various levels of fruit-bearing.

1) NO FRUIT = BRANCH REMOVED

2) SOME FRUIT = BRANCH IS PURGED

(to purge here means to remove impurities)

3) MORE FRUIT = FURTHER PURGING UNTIL...

4) MUCH FRUIT

The pinnacle of service to God is much fruit. Again, this isn't a numbers game. It has more to do with ever-increasing usefulness for God. Compared to where we began, have we increased in our fruitfulness?

"I MUST DECREASE"

(4) THE PATH TO MUCH FRUIT

Read the following verses very carefully. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to understand what He's saying here.

"23 And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. 24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. 25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. 26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will [my] Father honour. 27 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. 28 Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, [saying], I have both glorified [it], and will glorify [it] again. 29 The people therefore, that stood by, and heard [it], said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. 30 Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. 31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. 32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me. 33 This he said, signifying what death he should die."

- John 12:23-33 KJV

Things are about to get real! In the passages above, Jesus gives us a clear path to follow. In verse 24, Jesus reveals the only way to bear much fruit. "...but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit." Then He continues to explain that if we love ourselves more than serving Him, we lose.

John the Baptist had the right idea when he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."(John 3:30)

And finally,

(5) FRUITFULNESS IS WORSHIP

"8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

- John 15:8 KJV

The label "worship" gets thrown around a lot these days—everything from self-centered songs to weird artistic expressions. Don't misunderstand; I'm not criticizing sincere devotion to Christ. I also realize that someone who loves Jesus can "worship" in many different ways. But real worship has to have God Himself as the end goal. Worship isn't a song or movement. Those are outlets or implements to express reverence toward The Lord. Not merely some performance. Whether in public or private, God is always the audience, not the congregation of other people. Even our daily lives can be worship. How we live and share Christ brings glory to God. Much fruit brings glory to our God. It's at the very heart of worship, and worship is why we exist!

BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY!

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