

## THE LIVING FELLOWSHIP

*John 15:1 I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you. 8 In this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you shall be My disciples.*

There are two people in my life that get me – these are people that have a special place in my heart. The first one is my wife; each time I am in a fix, or I am discouraged and tired and I go and spend time with her, she has a way of getting me going again. I have a very special relationship with her – she is full of wisdom, and she knows how to refresh me. The other person is my pastor, pastor Paul. This man is God sent – he has a way of drawing the gold out of me, he knows how to inspire me, he knows how to correct me, and I am grateful to the Lord for that.

I am sure you all have people like that in your life and it speaks of how much we need to have close fellowship with key people in our lives. This brings me to our topic this morning – **THE LIVING FELLOWSHIP**.

I want to talk about the ultimate fellowship (*from the Greek word Koinonia, meaning holding something in common [shared beliefs, convictions and behavior]*) you should have, and this is the fellowship with the master Jesus. This is another level of fellowship, without which no one can survive in this world as believer.

Jesus and the disciples must have been on their way to the garden of Gethsemane and seeing the vineyards that lined both sides of the path might have prompted Jesus to outline the relationship that should exist between Him and the disciples.

- Your relationship with Jesus, was never meant to be a distant type one, one that is circumstantial – but rather it was meant to be an intimate and permanent type.
- I can picture Jesus slowing down and looking intently at a healthy vine, covered with a variety of branches – some green and full of life and some brown and wilting away

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and the following words came out of His mouth – *“I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser.”*

- In a vineyard, you will find some vines that are planted by the vinedresser, and you will find some vines that are naturally growing by themselves, and these are called wild vines.
- The difference between the two is usually clear because the ones planted by the vinedresser would be in a place that is well cultivated, well nourished and would naturally look healthy. On the other hand, the wild vines would usually be on the edges of the vineyard, unattended to and weak.
- Jesus then stood there and distinguished Himself from the wild vines and declared that He was the true vine.
- Jesus meant that He was the real and genuine vine that had been intentionally planted by His Father the Vinedresser.
- Every branch derives its nutrients, every branch whether small or great receives its daily apportionment of their livelihood from the vine – see picture.
- Through the main stem, all the nourishment of each branch is received.
- Bringing it back to Jesus, Jesus is the source of all real strength and grace to his disciples.
- The wellbeing of disciples is derived through their connection with the main trunk, which is Jesus the true vine.
- Jesus imparts to every branch what is necessary to bring forth fruit that looks like Christ Himself.
- A special connection between the vine and the branches must be maintained for the branch to survive – this is what I am referring to as a living fellowship.
- It is a fellowship that is constant, a union that is uninterrupted between Jesus and His disciples.

### **Two types of branches:**

*John 15: 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit.*

#### **1. The branch that bears no fruit**

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- This is an amazing type of branch – this branch looks like, smells like and behaves like all the other branches. If you don't look carefully, you will think that it belongs to the vine.
- This is a type of Christian who looks like, who talks like and who acts like a true Christian. The only difference is that this Christian is everything but a true disciple of Jesus.
- This is a pseudo-Christian and a nominal Christian in that in his heart of hearts, they are not born again but simply religious.
- Because they are not a disciple of Jesus, they cannot bear the fruit of a disciple, they cannot produce the fruit expected of the branch because they do not have the life of Jesus running in them.
- A pseudo-Christian can fellowship with Jesus but will not be able to produce a Christ-like life because this person is not born again.
- It is impossible to be truly saved and yet fail to produce the fruit of the spirit.
- The husbandman or the vine dresser does routine inspections of the vineyard, looking for fruit. Opposed to us, the vine dresser looks beyond the appearance and looks for the fruit.
- A disciple of Jesus cannot continue in the same sin without feeling convicted by the spirit of Jesus.
- If you struggle to bear the fruit of the spirit, it could be an indication that you are probably not born again. If you are like that, do not leave this building without opening your heart to Jesus.
- There is a consequence attached to being a pseudo-Christian. The consequence is that the vinedresser will cut away every branch that does not bear fruit.
- For a season, the vinedresser, allows both the fake and the true branches to grow together but there is a time of reckoning that will come.
- Like Judas Iscariot, every pretending Christian will be cut off – how does God cut away the pseudo-Christian?
  - God uses church discipline to cut off fruitless branches.
  - God uses temptation to cut away fruitless branches.
  - The cares of the world
  - Natural death

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### **2. The branch that bears fruit.**

*John 15: 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit*

- Every mango branch will produce mangoes of different quantities, but they will produce some fruit.
- If you are born again, the influence of the Holy Spirit will enable you to produce the fruit of holiness.

• The transforming power of the Holy Spirit breaks away the power of sin in your life.

*1 John 5:4-5 (NKJV) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

- If you are truly born again, you will not struggle to bear fruit. The new man in you desires things from above and not things of this world.

• It is through your fruit that people around you can know God and be drawn to God.

*Matthew 7:17-20 (NLT) A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. 19 So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. 20 Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.*

- Jesus did not leave us guessing regarding some of the fruit expected by the vinedresser when He goes around inspecting the vineyard.

#### **a) A trust that prompts prayerfulness**

*John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you.*

- A praying branch is one of the fruits that the vinedresser looks out for. Not only being prayerful but effective and fervent prayer is a fruit that the vinedresser looks for.
- It is in the nature of the vine to pray, Jesus prayed whilst on earth and He keeps on praying whilst in heaven.
- Anyone that is born of Jesus the vine, should love prayer. It is a travesty of theology for a true believer to hate times of prayer.

#### **b) A willingness to obey the commands of Christ.**

*John 15:10 If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.*

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- The vinedresser is looking for the fruit of obedience in every branch. This is because Jesus Himself was given to the highest level of obedience.
- Obedience is a high dimension of fruitfulness because through obedience, all other fruit flows.
- Obedience triggers an avalanche of blessings in the life of a believer. Obedience is the highest level of submission to authority and the vinedresser loves that.

### **c) A deep love for God's people**

*John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

- Your greatest gift to God, the vinedresser would be to love His people like yourself. It would be so selfless that your life looks like that of Christ the vine Himself.
- Because God loved, He gave His only son – when you love, you give sacrificially.
- When you love, you can easily forgive others. When you love, you are fit for purpose in God's kingdom.
- The fruitful branch is not cut away but receives tender, love and care (TLC) in the form of pruning.
- The vinedresser will take away anything that prohibits your fruitfulness. You might have great fellowship with Jesus, but certain habits negate the impact of the fellowship.
- It is the business of the vinedresser to remove those weights and hinderances.

### **Fruitfulness is a result of abiding in the vine.**

*John 15:4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*

- To abide means to permanently stay, to continue, to remain or to tarry in a place.
- This talks of a life that is fully dependent on Christ – this marked by a life of obedience, a life of faith in Jesus and a life that follows the example of Christ in every respect.
- Without abiding in Jesus, you cannot produce fruit. Without having Christ at the center of your life, you will be fruitless.
- Companionship with Christ grows with maturity. A true believer longs to be with Christ and the more you stick around Christ, the more of Him you want.