

## **Abide in Me: Fruit, More Fruit**

John 15:2

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The Gospel according to Saint John, chapter number 15, verses 1 through to verse number 8. The Word of God reads, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

Father, we come before You now in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I ask that You would send forth the Holy Spirit this morning to open the eyes of our understanding, to make alive the truth of the word, to convict us where needed, comfort us also where we are troubled, and bring us into everlasting joy and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Empower us, Lord, we pray, particularly myself as I bring the word. May all be done to the praise of the Lamb that was slain. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Last week, a few weeks ago now, we considered verse 1 of this chapter. We considered the teaching concerning Christ, who is the true vine, and we saw that Christ was the vine that Israel failed to be, and He is the final and, should I say, the full completion of the saving purposes of God found in Jesus Christ, who is the true vine. And we learned that being joined unto Him is really being joined unto a never-failing vine that will produce fruit in the lives of His people. And we considered how there are those that do not bear fruit, but they are not truly joined to this vine but are rather superficially attached to the vine, as was Judas.

But one thing we need to recognize today is that the main central purpose of this entire analogy is to teach us what fruit-bearing is and how we

are, as believers, to bear fruit unto God. This is something that is important for us to understand that I want us to, as we move forward through this portion of scripture over the next few weeks, that we would understand what is fruit-bearing and how it is that you and I can bear fruit unto God.

Now, what is important to understand is that fruit-bearing and understanding what fruit is in this passage is essential. If any of us fail to misunderstand what the meaning of fruit is in the text, we will not understand what it is that the vinedresser is trying to accomplish in us, and we will not understand whether or not we are truly attached to the vine. And so, understanding what the fruit is referring to in this passage is vital and essential. In fact, a failure to understand what fruit refers to in this text could lead us on a path to self-deception, thinking that we are bearing fruit when in fact we are not, and we are no different to those vine branches that bear no fruit, that are cut off, cast into the fire, and burned. And so it's important for us to understand that.

One thing that we need to also recognize is this: that our judgment often needs recalibration. Recalibration is the process of taking a measuring instrument, whether it's a thermometer, whether it's a digital compass, or whatever it may be, and what you do is you take this standard of this measurement, this instrument of measurement, and you apply it to a standard. And the point is that that standard, which is firm and fixed and unchanging, is meant to inform us as to the accuracy of the measuring instrument. And in calibration or recalibrating, what they do is they get the standard that is never changing, never moving, never failing, and they take that which is the measuring instrument and measure it up and adjust the measuring instrument so that it can give us right measurements.

Now, our discernment as human beings and our judgment is our measuring instrument. It is what we measure whether things are right or whether things are wrong. It's our judgment. It is our discernment. But our discernment is not infallible. Our discernment needs regular recalibration. And as time goes on, we can think that we are thinking right about, for example, fruit. But until we recalibrate our thinking and our judgment according to the never-failing, never-shifting standard of the Word of God, we will not be able to make right judgment concerning whether or not we are truly bearing fruit unto God. The Word of God is the standard. What needs recalibration is our judgment.

And so we're going to begin by asking the very important and fundamental question in this analogy, and it is this: What is fruit? What is fruitfulness according to what Jesus is referring to here? And so I want to consider just from the text to begin the nature of fruit-bearing. And I want us to understand first and foremost that it is fruit. That sounds very simple, but

it's very important. Fruit in the Bible, theologically, has the idea naturally connected to it as that which is manifest. Fruit is a manifestation. It is important to realize first and foremost that when we are talking about fruit, we are talking about a visible manifestation of something. But it is visible, and it is manifest. You know a tree, Jesus says, by its fruit. What Jesus is saying is because it's visible, it can be measured, it can be judged. It is something that manifests the nature of the tree. And so fruit is visible. Fruit is a visible manifestation.

But secondly, what we learn about the nature of fruit in this text is that the fruit in this text is increasing. And not only is it increasing, it is lasting. In verse number one of this passage, He says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." And verse two, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." So we have fruit, bearing fruit. We have also bearing more fruit. Verse five and verse number eight, we're introduced to the idea of bearing much fruit. And in verse number 16, Jesus says, "This is fruit which remains." And so what we learn from this is that the fruit that should be evident in the lives of those who truly belong to the vine is an increasing, permanent fruit. It has a measure of permanence, and it has a measure of increase. It is fruit, more fruit, much fruit. It is fruit that remains. And so we learn that it is visible, but it is also increasing and lasting.

But also, we take just from the simple analogy that fruit is useful. Fruit is useful. Fruit is a produce and therefore has use to those who seek to produce it. And so fruit, and the idea of having fruit, integral to that idea is the idea of produce, and fruit serves a particular end. Now, the Bible teaches us here that those that are fruitful have effective prayer lives, or efficacious praying. Look at it says there in verse number seven, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you," those are the ones that are fruitful, "you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." And so we see the efficacy of prayer in the life of those that truly bear fruit.

Also, what we see is fruit glorifies God; it glorifies the Father; it serves the end of glorifying the Father. Look at it says in verse number eight, "By this, by your fruit-bearing, is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." So will you be My disciples. But also, what we learn is that it's not—it is also part of this fruit-bearing, or the proof of fruitfulness, is also connected with the keeping of the commandments. Verse 10, "If you abide in—in My—if you keep My commandments, you abide in My love, even as I kept My Father's commandments and abide in My love." And what Jesus is saying here that fruit-bearing has uses. It is not simply something that has no end in goal. It is not something that is simply happens within us and has no manifestation or has no impact upon the world around us, those in

our lives, and also in our relationship to God.

And finally, what is important to realize about the nature of fruit-bearing is that the nature of fruit-bearing is this: fruit has a derivative source, meaning this: fruit, as verse number four says of our text, "Abide in Me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine." And what He's teaching us here is that this fruit is not of this itself. It is not hanging on the branch by itself. It is a—it comes from a derivative source. It comes from the vine into the branches and hangs from the branches. And therefore, what we learn about fruit-bearing is this very important lesson: that it cannot be invisible and undetectable. To say that we abide in Christ and that we are fruit-bearing Christians but to have nothing to show for it or that it cannot be detected by either ourselves or others is something to be wary of and to be careful concerning.

But secondly, what we must also realize is that whatever fruit comes from our branches, because it comes from a derivative source from the vine, it must characteristically be the same as the vine. It must resemble the vine. It must resemble the vine. This can be illustrated by the illustration of a fountainhead and a river. There is an inseparable link between the fountainhead and the river. The fountainhead springs forth into the river. And so when you see the river, you know that the river comes from the source of the fountainhead. And so to say that there is a fountainhead but no river is to say that there is no fountainhead because the fruit of the fountainhead is the river. It is the manifest evidence that there is a source from which this river flows.

And so also, what we can realize from this illustration of the fountainhead and the river is that the fountainhead produces a spring and a river that, if you test the water of that river, it will be characteristically the same as the water that comes from the fount. If it's saltwater head, it's a saltwater river, and so forth and so on. And the world is full of examples like this. Think of the concept of offspring. Here is a husband and wife in union together, and they produce what we call offspring, which means something that springs off their union, something that springs off their relationship. It is their offspring, which means if you were to test the spring, it will resemble that which it came off, which is the parents to which it belonged.

And the same is also true with agriculture and with the fruit of the vine. The fruit of the vine resembles the vine. It cannot be characteristically different from the vine. And therefore, what we learn about fruit-bearing is that our fruit must resemble the likeness and the fruitfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is the vine to whom our branches are attached. The fountainhead of all true fruit and its manifestation comes from what the Bible says is the Spirit of God. In Galatians chapter number 5, verses

22 to 23, the Bible says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

Notice first that this is fruit that is of the Spirit, meaning it is the manifestation of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of those who truly belong to Him. Those that have the Spirit indwelling them manifest a life that is in fruits, and therefore, the Spirit is the fountainhead of that true fruit. But this fruit is a manifestation of the Spirit's indwelling, but it is no more than that. It is a manifestation to the world around us as evidences and to those in our community and to God Himself as evidence of our faith in Jesus Christ. Evidence that we truly belong to the Spirit.

You see, it's no good saying we have love if that love is not visible. What is the visible manifestation of our love? John says if we love not only in word, we should love but in deed and in truth. The Bible teaches us that love should have a visible manifestation, a visible expression. What about our joy? Our joy should come from within with a deep satisfaction in God. That should lead to praise. That should lead to adoration. We think about joy, peace. Peace is a calm assurance that should really affect our relationships and bring calmness into our relationships. Long-suffering cannot just be something that exists without manifestation. It must look like an enduring patience, endurance with people that give you a hard time. Self-control must look like a disciplined and proportionate response to all life's problems that come our way.

This is the fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and just like every fruit has manifestation and is visible, people should be able to taste of the fruit that hangs from our branches. And God should be able to see and receive pleasure and joy in the fruit that hangs from us, His branches, the branches of the Lord Jesus Christ, the vine. As we know, there is such a thing as artificial fruit. You've probably gone into someone's house, or you may have it in your own house. You've been hungry, perhaps, and you've walked into the kitchen, and you saw on the bench, there on the table, a nice bowl of fruit, shiny and everything. And it just took you two, three seconds to realize that's actually not fruit. That's artificial fruit. It gives the appearance of fruit, but it in itself is not true fruit. And upon closer examination, sometimes even has got me so much that I've had to pick it up and look at it to see if it's real or not. But upon closer examination, it becomes evident that that fruit is not true fruit. That its source is not a vine or a branch somewhere, but rather its source is the factory, and its nature doesn't have the properties of fruit, but it has the properties of plastic. And therefore, it is of no use to us, is it, to eat and to be satisfied from.

And so it is with much of religion today in the world that it shares the

appearance of fruits, but upon closer examination, it is no fruit at all. And a good example of this is found in the scripture, particularly in relationship to Judas himself, who, as we looked at the other week, was a branch that was connected to the vine but superficially, not truly receiving of the Lord the life of the vine. In John chapter 12, verses 5 and 6, this lady comes to the Lord Jesus. If you want to turn there, you can. This lady comes to the Lord Jesus, and she has a fragrant oil, and she breaks this fragrant box of oil, and she pours this oil upon the Lord out of a display of great love for Him and adoration for Him and affection for the Lord Jesus, and the disciples, but in particularly Judas himself, perks up here and has a problem with what was taking place before him.

And in John chapter 12, verse number five, this is what Judas says in response to this sacrifice that this lady has made. He says, "Why was the fragrant oil not," he says, "sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" So here, if you might consider Judas just briefly for a moment, you might think that Judas has genuine concern for the poor, would you not? Here is a man that has seen this money, this fragrant oil worth three hundred denarii, poured upon the Lord Jesus, and he says, "Hey, we could make better use of that. We could sell that, and we could help the poor." You might say, "Well, great. Fruit of the Spirit. He's a man that loves the poor. He's a man that wants to show acts of kindness." Here is somebody that wants to do something beneficial for others and sell something to benefit others. But look at the text of scripture says, look what John comments on here. Look what he helps us to understand. He says this, "He said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box and used to take what was put in it."

You know what John helps us see from this? That what appears to us to seem like care from the outside, without the commentary of John helping us realize what was actually happening in the heart of Judas, we might believe and think that this man had genuine and real care. And what it teaches us is this: there's a lot of works that happen in our day to day in the name of Jesus Christ that bear not the source of the vine, that does not come from true, genuine motivations because of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit within our hearts, because of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather arises from ulterior motives so as to serve our own ends and not the ends of the one to whom fruit-bearing must give glory, which is God Himself. This is what we call false fruit. Its source is not true care. It is not from the vine. The source of his actions and concerns here was greed. And the manifestation of that greed was an artificial care that did not resemble true care as the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it was deceptive.

And so when we're examining ourselves in light of fruit-bearing and ask-

ing ourselves the hard question as to whether or not we truly belong to the vine, we must ask ourselves this question: what is the source from which my actions spring? What are the motivations for what I do, what I do? There is so much that happens today in the name of Jesus Christ, for the cause of Jesus Christ, that serves three main selfish motives. One is self-righteousness. The other is the fear of man. The other is the praise of man. And that attitude creeps even into the lives of God's people. And when we act in such a way, even as true Christians bearing true fruit, but when we fall for things like the praise of man and fall for things like being self-righteous or fall for things and attitudes like fearing man, we produce fruit that is no fruit at all, but we deceive ourselves, thinking that we are offering God's service when in fact we are only serving our own ends, like Judas himself.

So the hard question we have to ask ourselves in self-examination is: what is fruit-bearing? Why do we bear the fruit or the perceived fruit that we bear? Let me just summarize. So then, what is true fruit? Well, we can put it this way: True fruit is the ever-increasing, enduring practice of true religion that flows through us from the life of the vine. It is fruit that is efficacious. It is fruit that bears the nature and the life of Christ and His works. This is what it means to bear true fruit, true fruit unto God.

But in verse number two of our passage, the Bible says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit," this kind of fruit that we've been talking about, "He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit," this true fruit, this fruit that comes from our union with Christ and depends upon Him, "He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." And so we looked at what is fruit-bearing, but we have to ask ourselves now this question: what does the vinedresser do to the branches, to the vine, so as to secure more of this good fruit for His glory and even for our good?

The Bible says in verse number two that every branch that bears fruit, He prunes. Pruning is the process of cutting back and cleansing the vine so that the gardener can prepare the vine for greater use. When pruning happens, what the intention of the vinedresser is, is that this vine may, by pruning, by cutting back, by cleansing, may produce more fruit, and that it may not only produce more of a quantity of fruit, but in fact, pruning itself also produces a better quality of fruit. You see, on any vine, there are leaves, there are other bits and pieces, and maybe clusters that are growing that grow too closely together so that the fruit cannot ripen properly. So even a vinedresser and a gardener cuts back the branches so as to get the quality and the ripeness of the vine, of the grapes, but he also does so to improve the quantity and the consistency of the fruitfulness of that vine.

But another thing pruning does also is that it cuts back and cleanses the

branch from any potential diseases that can overrun the branches and destroy the fruit. And so pruning has a multifaceted purpose, but what we need to learn about pruning is that the purpose of pruning, although it is good and although it has good ends, it doesn't come without pain. The instrument used in pruning is a knife. And when the knife is applied to the vine and to the branches, it always afflicts the branches; it always afflicts the vine. In fact, every time a person or a gardener goes and prunes his vineyard, what of necessity happens is that the vine bleeds; it is wounded; it is cut; and what might seem like an act of cruelty to the agriculturally ignorant is actually a wise, purposeful craft of the vinedresser so as to secure more fruit on that vine. It is a painful process. It wounds the vine; it wounds the branches; it wounds that, but it serves the vine; it serves the branches; and it serves the vinedresser for greater good and for greater ends.

And so what we learn from this is that we who bear fruit unto God, in a matter of time, would and should experience the sanctifying and afflicting wounds of the providence of a faithful vinedresser. The Bible teaches us that there is a vinedresser, and He cares so much for His vine. He cares for the fruitfulness of that which He has planted. And He goes to work on His vine. And part of the work that the vinedresser does to the vine is that He afflicts the vine with sanctifying wounds so that the vine produces more and more fruits, for the pleasure of the vine dresser and for the health of the vine.

And so what we learn from this is that we, as the branches of the vine, the true vine of Jesus Christ, are subjected to the providences, dark providences, of our Heavenly Father so as to secure more fruit on our vine, as to cleanse our vine, to strip our vine of excess, to strip our vine of things that will hinder the quality of the fruit, to strip our vine of things that hinder us from bearing more fruit, to strip our vine, our branches, from disease that could overrun the fruits of our branch. And the Heavenly Father goes to work, and He takes His knife, and He cuts, and He prunes, and He cuts, and He prunes, and we, as the branches, bleed. But what is He doing? He, by afflicting us, is preparing us for greater fruitfulness and usefulness for His kingdom and for His glory.

You see, affliction strips us of false security. There is so much false securities that we have, and God sends the knife, the sharp knife, into our branches and cuts back and prunes us. And He may do so sometimes through relationships. How many times have we, perhaps, had disappointment in our relationships? People that we trusted, people that we loved, people that we gave our time and energy and effort to, that turned on us, that hurt us, that cut us, and we say, "Lord, why? How could this be? How could this be so?" Let me just share with you, dear people of God, that God



is doing this, or perhaps has allowed this to happen, for this purpose, so that we might learn this truth: that it is better to put your confidence in the Lord than to trust and put your confidence in man.

How many times have we thought that we are going to have more material possession, and we have found ourselves landing on the crutch of material possessions, and we are safe in the things that we possess? And then one day, something comes into our lives, and a business deal goes bad, or we lose our business, or we lose some money, or someone does something to us that causes us great loss. And we say, "Why, Lord, why? Why such great loss?" And the Lord whispers to us, "I want you to learn something from this, my son, my daughter. I want you to learn that I am your portion forever."

How often have we lost family and loved ones, even for the sake of Jesus Christ? We bear our cross; we follow Him, and it leads to not having the same relationship that we had with friends and family. And we say, "Why, Lord, why? Why such things?" But it's the Lord trying to teach us and prepare us for greater fruitfulness, teaching us that these insecurities that we hold on to are not worth holding on to, but we must hold on to Him. So we learn what the psalmist said, "If my mother and father forsake me, the Lord will take me up." How can you know that without someone forsaking you? But He strips us of our security so that we may rest in Him.

He let the children of Israel wander in the wilderness and get hungry. And the Bible teaches us so that they might learn and might know that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; that's what man should live by. That their provision does not come from their own labors and their own efforts but from God Himself, who allows them to hunger. And you can add and consider the dark providences that have come your way, but whatever has come your way, you can know this: that the pruning of my branches is so that I might know this truth and this truth alone, that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.

And so when I look at my vine, and when I look at my branches, and all seems stripped and all seems bare and all seems helpless and hopeless, and it looks like the winter is upon this vine and that there is no hope for its future, you may remember that the vinedresser has purposely worked these things in our lives, from our branches, to teach us lessons, to prepare us for greater fruitfulness. Affliction in the word of God helps us lean and see the value of God's word. How often have you been reading your Bible, and it seems to be dead to you? Or it seems not so much of a treasure to you? The word of the Lord loses its significance in your life. And all of a sudden, the dark, sharp providence, the piercing knife of the vinedresser, cuts off

your branches, and you feel like you're in despair. Things are wrong in your life, and you pick up that word, and you read it. And the same passages that seemed like a dry morsel in the past are like fresh manna from heaven.

The word of God is accompanied often by sharp afflictions to teach us how valuable it is to us, that His word is our confidence, His voice is our hope. In fact, some relate this—Jesus in verse number three says, "Now you are already clean," and that word clean means pruned, "through the word which I have spoken unto you." Jesus is referring to the regeneration, that the affliction of the word of God, if you could say, or the cleansing power of the word of God, convicted them of sin, cut them back, as it were, and cleansed them from their disease and made them whole. Pruned them. But now the father comes with his pruning knife and continues the work of pruning and sanctifying of His people. And so Jesus says in John chapter 17, "Sanctify them through Your truth. Your word is truth." The cleansing power of the word sometimes comes riding on the back of providences so as to pierce our hearts and teach us of the goodness of God. Listen to what the Psalmist says in Psalm 119: "He said it was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes." "It was good that I was afflicted so that I might learn." Notice how he benefited so much from the word in affliction. He says, "If Your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction." He said, "Oh, I've learned Your statutes in my affliction, but you know what? If I didn't have Your word in affliction, I would have perished." What is it telling us? That the word of God was so precious to him due to his affliction; it showed and made manifest how beautiful and precious it was, sweet to his taste.

He says in Psalm 119 verse 67, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word." See that more fruitfulness? Here is a man that was not as fruitful as he should have been. He was afflicted. Now he keeps God's word. Now he keeps His commandments. Now he bears more fruit. Why? Because of the pruning knife of affliction in his life. Dear people of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, can you say with the Psalmist this morning, "Trouble and anguish have come upon me, yet Your commandments are my delight"?

So often when we are afflicted, we do not treasure the word of God as we ought. But understand this: affliction will come, and it will come to all the branches that bear fruit. All fruit-bearing Christians are well acquainted with the vinedresser's knife, and we are not exempt. Look through the word of God, turn through its pages, pick one of the saints that have gone before us, and ask yourself this question: have they not also been afflicted? Peer through God's word. Look at Moses, look at Abraham, look at those saints of God, the disciples of Jesus, and ask yourself the question: were these branches fruitful? You must say yes. But what lay between their fruit-

fulness and their more fruitfulness and their much fruitfulness and their fruitfulness that remained was the affliction of God that taught them.

God sent Moses into the backside of the desert to learn the goodness and graciousness of the Lord so that when he returned to Egypt, he might serve as a faithful, humble, and real deliverer of God's people. But not apart from affliction. Why do you think that we are exempt? Why is it that when we have affliction in our lives, we cry out, "God, why me? Is there something wrong with me?" In fact, affliction should serve to our comfort because it teaches us that we are part of this vine, and we are bearing true fruit unto God.

So therefore, let it comfort us, dear people of God, that when you are afflicted, that God is serving greater purposes in your life to make you more fruitful for His glory and for His kingdom. Pruning is not the wrath of God. It's the loving chastening and shaping of the vinedresser of the vine so that it might prepare you for more fruitfulness. And the way God deals with us, He deals also with a bruised reed. He doesn't break us. He seeks to make us more and more and more and more like His Son. He tenderly, although it cuts, although it hurts, He tenderly attends to His vine.

Dear Christian, do not be surprised when affliction comes your way. Don't look at your life and say, "What is going on? There is no fruit of my branches right now. I look like a bare vine, and it seems like there is no hope of future fruitfulness for me. Have I gone wrong? Is there sin in my life? What is going on?" Dear people of God, understand this, that it just may be well that God is preparing you for greater service and greater things for His kingdom. He's stripping you from securities that you should not be holding on to and helping you come to the reality that God is your all in all. He's tearing away those branches and those leaves that are covering and breaking down the quality of your grapes. He is cutting into your life to make you more useful and more fruitful for His kingdom.

How often are we like the stubborn horse and the mule that do not understand? We look at life, and we get into despair because trouble is coming our way, and we look at our branches and say, "What on earth is going on?" But we do not hear the words of this text: "All that bare fruit, the vine dresser comes, prunes, so that they may bear more fruit." Do not kick against those providences; receive them. Learn to worship Him through them. Learn to put Him as your stake. Learn to hold upon Him. Learn to love His word in the time of affliction. Let the Lord deal with you. Let Him cut you. Let Him bring you low so that you might blossom and bud when the day of spring comes, when the shining grace of God turns its face towards you once again, and you will bear fruit like you never have before. Trust in the goodness and the faithfulness of the providence of an all-wise

vine dresser who is working trouble in your life to bring forth fruits unto His glory and for your good.

"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons. Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees, and make straight a path for your feet." Do not despair in pruning. Lift up your head. Look to the Lord and see that days of greater fruitfulness are around the corner, even though right now all may seem grim and helpless for your vine. Let us pray.