

been the message on the screen on all 50 of my messages in the gospel of John.

But on that slide, there are some subtle images around the words. These images are my attempt to show the two main features of the gospel of John. First off, the gospel of John contains signs. There are **seven signs**.

If you look hard enough on the slide, you can identify them.

The first of the signs is recorded in John, chapter 2, in which we see Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:1-11). Do you remember this story? Jesus and his disciples were at a wedding, and they ran out of wine, so Jesus had the attendants fill up the six stone water jars with water. By the time the master of ceremonies tasted the water, it had become wine.

The second sign is the healing the official's son (John 4:46-54). Do you remember this story? Jesus was in Cana, and the royal official came from Capernaum, some 20 miles away, to ask Jesus about his child. Jesus told him, "Go, your son will live" (John 4:50). As it turns out, Jesus said that at the "seventh hour," which is 1 o'clock in the afternoon, which was the very time that the boy was healed back in Capernaum.

The third sign is the healing the paralytic (John 5:1-18). Do you remember this story? This man had been an invalid for 38 years. Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk" (John 5:8). And he did! This got Jesus into trouble, as he healed this man on the Sabbath.

The fourth sign is the feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-15). Do you remember this story? Jesus took the five loaves of bread and the two fish that the boy gave to them. Jesus gave thanks, and the food multiplied, so that the crowd was filled to the full! When the crowds saw this, they wanted to make him king!

The fifth sign is the Walking on the Water (John 6:16-21) Do you remember? The disciples were in a boat at night, several miles from shore. and Jesus walked out to them and got in the boat.

The sixth sign is Jesus Giving Sight to the Blind Man (John 9) Do you remember? Jesus and the disciples encountered a man who Jesus spit on the ground, making mud with his saliva (John 9:6). Jesus anointed the eyes with the mud (John 9:6) and told him to "Go" and "wash." He did so, and he came back seeing!

The seventh sign is Raising Lazarus from the Dead (John 11) Do you remember? Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus. He had died and was in the tomb for four days. And Jesus came to the tomb and said, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43). And Lazarus came out of the tomb, still wrapped as a mummy for burial.

All seven of these signs were written by John for a purpose, which he gives in John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Of all of the signs that John could have written down for us, he chose these seven, to convince us of the nature of Jesus, that he was the God-man, come to earth, for nobody could do such signs, unless he was God.

John's call upon our lives is simple: Believe in him, that you may have life in his name. Or, as we have seen week after week for these 50 messages in the gospel of John, "Believe, So That You May Live!"

But those aren't the only chicken scratches on the logo. There are also some along the top. These aren't "the signs." These are **seven sayings**. They all begin with Jesus saying, "I am." And each of these sayings were a metaphor for believing in Jesus.

The first comes in chapter 6. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." This came right after Jesus fed the 5,000. Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

The second saying comes in chapters 8 and 9. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Jesus, then, illustrated this by giving sight to the blind man in chapter 9. Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The third saying comes in chapter 10, where Jesus picks up the shepherding metaphor. Jesus said, "I am the door" (John 10:7). That is, "I am the gate into the sheepfold, where his sheep are safe." Jesus said, "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

The fourth saying also comes in chapter 10, and also picks up the shepherding metaphor. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). That is, the one who

watches out for the sheep, doing everything for the sheep in love for them. Jesus said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). And that’s what Jesus did in dying upon the cross for our sins!

The fifth saying comes in chapter 11. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). Jesus then illustrated this by raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus said, “Everyone who believe in me shall never die” (John 11:26). That’s the hope that we have in Jesus, eternal life.

The sixth saying comes in chapter 14. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). He told this to his troubled disciples in the Upper Room, giving them assurance that he was indeed the way to God. In fact, Jesus said that he is the only way to God, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). This is why the Bible is so important, because you don’t come to the Father in any other way that through Jesus, not through other religious leaders, not through your own works and efforts, but through Jesus alone. This is why it is important, that you believe in Jesus.

The seventh saying comes in chapter 15. Jesus says, “I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

This is the only sign or saying that we have not looked at during our time in the gospel of John, until today. The title of my message is, “I am the True Vine.” It comes from John 15:1-6.

Before I read these verses, I want to point out the last sentence in chapter 14, which we looked at last week.

We read (in verse 31), Jesus saying, “Rise, let us go from here.” That is, from the Upper Room where he and his disciples celebrated the Passover. They are headed for the Garden of Gethsemane, where they arrive in chapter 18. It seems as if chapter 15, 16, and 17 took place during their walk to the garden, as Jesus was teaching them along the way.

With the change of scenery comes a change in topic. In chapter 14, we saw Jesus comforting the disciples, as they were wrestling with the reality of (1) a betrayer and (2) a denier, and (3) that Jesus was leaving them! His main message to them came in the very first verse of chapter 14: “Let not your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1). Jesus then explains that he will leave them, but we will come again to get

them (John 14:3). And when he leaves, he will not leave them as orphans (John 14:18), but he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them as a “Helper” (John 14:15, 25). And he will give them peace. John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

But now, in chapter 15, as I said, with the change of scenery comes a change in topic. He says, “I am the true vine.” Let’s read our text.

John 15:1-11

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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

The main metaphor of these verses is established in verses 1 and 2. Verse 1 says this:

John 15:1

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Jesus is taking this illustration from the agricultural practices of the day. Here in the Midwest, our crops are corn and soybeans. Not so in Israel where Jesus lived. They grew olives and grapes. In this case, Jesus is talking about the grapevine. Jesus says that he is the vine, that is, the life-giving plant. Jesus says that the Father is the vinedresser, the one who takes care of the vine.

The closest we have today in our culture are the apple orchards. Jesus says that he is the tree, at that his Father is in owner of the orchard, the one who oversees the growth of the trees.

Jesus then applies this metaphor regarding the fruit that the vine yields. Look at verse 2.

John 15:2

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

The Father, as the vine dresser, does what every vinedresser does. He cares for the vine. He waters the vine; he pulls the weeds growing near the vine; he adjusts where the vine branches go, much like we might adjust our tomato plants. He trims the vine, cutting off those parts of the vine that are fruitless, pruning off those parts of the vine where others might grow better.

As the metaphor goes, we are the branches that are attached to the vine. The Father cares for us.

Jesus then turns to address the disciples. He says, (in verse 3),

John 15:3

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

This seems like a misplaced verse. How does he go from cutting off branches and pruning to talking about being clean?

I believe that these are words of assurance to the disciples. The disciples are “clean.” In the context, this goes back to chapter 13 and verse 10, in which Jesus was washing their feet. Peter initially refused to have his feet washed (John 13:8). And then, when Jesus said that if his feet aren’t washed, he has no share with Jesus (John 13:8). So Peter said, “Wash my feet and my hands and my head!” (John 13:9). And Jesus said, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you” (John 13:10). That is an allusion to Judas. All of the disciples were clean, except for Judas, who had left them to betray him.

In the case of this vine metaphor, in verse 2, Judas was one of those branches that was not bearing fruit, which were taken away. But the other disciples were clean,

that is, they were “bearing fruit.” Yet, that didn’t mean that were free from trouble and hardship.

Trouble and hardship are the very context of these chapters. Jesus was going away. And they would experience some hardships as a result. In chapter 15, verse 19, Jesus tells his disciples that the world will hate them. In chapter 16, verse 33, Jesus tells his disciples that tribulation awaits them. But in all of it, the disciples were under that loving care of the vinedresser, who was concerned that they would bear fruit.

Oh, it may be painful. Oh, it may be difficult. But the vinedresser is concerned with fruit, whereby he would receive the grapes. And so, he does whatever it takes to produce the fruit, even pruning the vine, which Jesus speaks about in the second half of verse 2, "and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

These disciples would indeed go through some pruning. In Acts 4:5, Peter and John were arrested and beaten. In Acts 8, the church experienced such persecution that the church was scattered from Jerusalem for their own safety. Several of the early followers of Jesus were put to death. Stephen was stoned for his boldness (Acts 7). James (the brother of John) was executed by the government (Acts 12). And eventually, according to church history, all of them (except for John) would be martyred for their faith.

In the greater church this week, we saw some pruning, as Charlie Kirk was assassinated on the campus of Utah Valley University. Certainly, Charlie Kirk was involved in the political process. But more than that, Kirk was an outspoken Christian, who was shot by someone who wasn’t pleased with the message that he was bringing.

Charlie Kirk was a great man, a great leader, having hundreds of Turning Point USA chapters on college campuses all across our nation. He was very outspoken for his faith. His assassination was a great loss for the church, but it’s a pruning, that will only yield more fruit in the future. "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2).

It just may be that the ministry of Charlie Kirk and Turning Point USA blossoms far more than ever before!

Regarding the church, Tertullian (the church father) said, “The blood of the

martyrs is seed” that is, “seed of the church.” We never need to worry about the future of the church that Jesus Christ has promised to build (Matthew 16:16).

You look at the book of Acts, and you see the pattern: persecution brings growth. So much so that within a few hundred years, the Roman Empire, which tried to squash Christianity through persecution and torture and burnings at the stake, became “The Holy Roman Empire,” accepting Christianity as its major religion.

A great modern story is the Chinese Church under Communist Persecution. After a century of intense missionary activity, in 1949, missionaries were expelled from China. Churches were closed. Christians were imprisoned. Some Christian leaders were martyred. Yet, the Chinese church grew. In 1949, estimates put the numbers of Christians in China to be close to a million followers of Jesus. But through the persecution, without missionaries, the church has grown in China, where today there would be 20-100 million followers in Jesus, exact numbers are difficult to know. And the church in China is continuing to grow as it faces persecution. One report said, “There is no longer a safe place to be a Christian in China.”^[1] Yet, I promise you, that as the church in China is pruned further, it will continue to grow more and more.

But do you know where the church is declining? Here in America, where there is little persecution, where we are free to speak our beliefs. This is because, by in large, we are not being pruned. Charlie Kirk was the exception, not the rule. That's why there has been such a huge response to his assassination. But, mind you, Charlie Kirk was not put to death by the state in some act of official persecution, he was killed one who hated his message. We have incredible freedom here in the United States to practice our faith with openness and boldness. Yet, without the societal pressure pushing against the church, the church, by in large is declining.

Anyway, pruning happens on a large scale like this, but pruning also happens on a small scale in each of our lives, as God brings trials of various kinds into our lives. These trials are designed for our growth, that we might bear more fruit!

James said it this way, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (James 1:2-3). When hardships come upon your life, and your faith is tested, know this, the Lord is pruning you, for greater fruit, as you remain steadfast in following him!

Consider the following verses:

Romans 5:3-5

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Hebrews 12:3-11

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our

good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Back to John 15.

This is the hope that Jesus was giving his disciples: "Yes, I am leaving you. Yes, it will be difficult. Yes, you will have hardship, even being hated by the world. But do not lose heart, because it is all designed by the vinedresser for your good." "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We need to look to the one who overcame the world in the midst of our trials and tribulations. We see this in verse 4, where Jesus says,

John 15:4

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

Time for an illustration. I have two plants before you here. The first is a cup with some flowers. The second is a pot with an overflowing plant.

Now, let me ask you, what is the future of the flowers? The flowers in the cup will be withered up in but a week. They will soon find themselves in the garbage soon. Why? They were cut off from their roots, and there is no way for them to sustain themselves.

On the other hand, what is the future of the plant in the pot? If they are watered correctly, they will last a long time. I asked Yvonne about how long we have had this plant. She said, "Since COVID!" That's five years! How can the plant survive so long? Because it's connected to the plant, and the roots and the soil.

So also comes the key to bearing fruit. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. If we are cut off from the vine, we will wither and die. To use the words of Jesus, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (verse 4). For us to bear fruit as believers, we must abide in Jesus. We must have our connection with Jesus.

So, how are we to abide in the True Vine?

I think it begins with Bible reading. You can't abide in Jesus if you don't know Jesus. We come to know Jesus through the pages of the Scripture. My heart for you is that you would be a regular Bible reader. My heart for this church is that we would be a community of Bible readers. That's why Yvonne and I are so committed to our "Read Thru the Bible" podcast. We want to do everything in our power to help you abide in Jesus.

After Bible reading (and this almost comes without saying), it is believing what you read. You can't abide in Jesus if you don't believe in him. You can't abide in Jesus if you don't believe that he died upon the cross for your sins.

Thirdly, you abide in Jesus through prayer. And when I say "prayer," I'm not primarily talking about hours on your knees. I'm talking about the daily, hourly communion with Jesus that's constantly submitting all of your day into his hands. That's what "abide" means. It means, "to remain, to stay, to continue, to dwell, to endure." And "abiding in Jesus" is a constant, continual, prayer to Jesus for guidance and help and strength and wisdom. Look at how Jesus says it in verse 5,

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

To not live in constant communion with Jesus is to be like a flower that has been cut at the stem, without any connection to its roots. Any life that appears to be, will be short-lived. Do you want to bear much fruit for Jesus? Abide in him! And realize how dependent you are upon Jesus. Jesus said,

John 15:5

for apart from me you can do nothing.

That's a pretty exclusive statement. Of course, it doesn't mean that you can't do anything apart from Jesus. You can move and walk and live and talk and laugh and eat just fine without Jesus. But it does mean that you can't do anything of spiritual profit or usefulness apart from Jesus. It means that all of our Christian lives, if it is ever to be fruitful, is to be lived with this dependence of Christ working in us and through us.

And I fear that many people fill their lives with Christian activity without any actual abiding in Jesus. Lot of religion is done on the outside with no real genuine

spiritual impact because it is just activity without any abiding in Jesus. You can do many things without abiding in Jesus.

You can come here this morning, sit in the pew, attend church regularly, week in and week out, with a sense of obligation, rather than love for Jesus. This brings forth no fruit. But abiding says, "Oh, Jesus, I love you! I want to meet with your saints! I want to meet with your people! I want to hear from you! Speak to me now! Help me! Strengthen me!" That's what it means to abide. It means coming with an inward need of Christ and an expectation of help through the gathering of the church. You can attend a church service without any of this. And we could build a big church with a lot of people doing a lot of this. And in God's eyes, it is nothing!

You can have lots of reading the Bible reading without abiding. You can read for knowledge or status or reputation, rather than a genuine heart that seeks to know God. There are liberal people who read the Bible a bunch more than you, but don't believe it a lick, because they are fascinated by the ancient near-eastern languages and culture. There are many who have Bible knowledge without spiritual profit, because there is no genuine longing and yearning for God. There is no confession of sin that comes with the convicting work of the Scripture. There is no on-your-knees pleading for illumination by the Holy Spirit into the truths of the Scriptures. There is no realizing that apart from Christ, any reading of the Bible profits me zero.

You can have lots of serving without abiding. Churches can give passionate appeals to all of the serving needs in the church. And people can respond in droves. Yet, they can serve out of a sense of duty, without any sense the eager expectation of the blessing of God in serving others. The Scripture says that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Abiding in Christ will serve with the expectation of the blessing that will come through serving. Also, people can serve in their own strength, rather than depending upon the strength that Jesus gives, that says, "I want to be your hand in the lives of others. I want to be a channel of blessing in my service. I long to lift and encourage others. I want to see them edified. So work in those I serve." Such is the attitude of those who serve others while abiding in Jesus. But there is lots of service that goes on with none of this sort of attitude. And Jesus says, "It is nothing."

There is lots of preaching that happens without abiding in Christ. Perhaps I'm preaching to myself here. I know how I can preach with little abiding in Jesus or trust in the Lord. I have done enough preaching to know how I can easily do it in

my own strength, without praying and pleading with the Lord for him to work through me. Now, if you think that I'm always praying and pleading and depending upon the Lord in my preaching, always so spiritually trusting and abiding in Jesus when I preach, I'm afraid that you are wrong. I'm sure that I fail to abide in Christ through the preaching process far more often than I succeed. There are many preachers who seek the praise of men, rather than seeking the approval of Christ by abiding in him. I so long to preach in such a way that Christ would work through me in your lives.

Lots of leading worship happens without abiding in Christ. This takes place when the focus is upon performance rather than glorifying God. Songs can be chosen merely out of personal preference. Songs may be sung because the song is enjoyable. But abiding in Christ means to lead worship through dependent prayer that the Lord would use your words to stir the hearts of the congregation who is singing along with you. Abiding in Christ will deeply pray for these things to be the reality, not just sound. You can sing loudly without abiding. You can sin with joy without abiding. You can sing with joy on your face without abiding. And if you do these things, God is not pleased. The LORD told Israel, "Take away from me the noise of your songs" (Amos 5:23).

Evangelism can also take place without abiding in God, and therefore to no effect. Many times, people do evangelism, merely so that they can tell other people of what they have done. This is especially the case on social media, where people are sharing their every moment of religious effort for the world to see. Yet, we are called to tell others of Jesus as we abide in Jesus.

Lots of Christian lingo is used to appear spiritual in front of others. We have learned to speak "Christianese," which bring sayings into such a common place that they have no meaning. People say, "I'll pray for you" and then don't pray. But if you abide in Jesus, your words will come out of love, especially as you pray moment by moment everything that you should say.

In calling us to abide in him, Jesus here is calling us to walk in utter, daily dependence upon him in all that we do, so that we connect ourselves to the vine. Let's end with verse 6, which comes as a warning.

John 15:6

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

I do believe that this is talking about Judas, who was never a believer in Jesus, but followed after him for all of the religious benefits. He had access to the money. Perhaps he saw following Jesus as some great adventure.

But the warning comes to all of you as well. What's your church involvement? How are you engaged. Is it just for the externals? Or, are you here because you are abiding in him and longing on a day to day basis to know him and to make him known?

I say, "May it not be us, that we might not be thrown into the fire to be burned." Rather, I say, "Let us abide in Jesus and bear forth fruit."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 14, 2025
by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] See <https://www.christiantoday.com.au/news/there-is-no-longer-a-safe-place-to-be-a-christian-in-china-re.html>.