

# Astep FURTHER

DIVING DEEPER INTO SUNDAY'S SERMON

*A resource of First Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale for individuals, families, and small groups that offers deeper insights into the previous Sunday's scripture text and sermon.*

## From the Sermon on 5/17/26 "Abiding in the Vine"

**Opening Prayer:** *"Gracious God, thank you for not leaving us alone. As we open your Word today, send your Holy Spirit to be our counselor and guide. Give us courage to hear what you want to say to us, even when it's uncomfortable. Help us trust that your pruning is always for our good and your glory. Open our hearts to receive what you have for us today. Amen."*

**Scripture:** John 15:1-8

<sup>1</sup>"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

**Understanding the Context:** (Explore aspects of the passage like place, adjacent scripture, and other elements)

1. Where does this conversation take place, and what has Jesus just promised his disciples?
2. Why would Jesus' original audience, fishermen and farmers from rural Galilee, have understood this vine metaphor differently than we might today?

**Key Themes:** (Abiding in the Vine)

3. According to verse 2, what happens to branches that bear fruit AND branches that don't bear fruit? What does this reveal about God's purposes for pruning?
4. The sermon states: "Past fruit bearing is not a reliable predictor for future production." How does this challenge our assumptions about spiritual growth and productivity?

**Application and Action:**

5. The sermon asks: "What are you clinging to?" Take a moment of silence and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal one area of your life, such as a habit, relationship, ministry, or way of doing things, that might need pruning. What comes to mind?

6. Todd Bolsinger writes that "sabotage is not a bad thing done by evil people. It's a human thing done by anxious people." When have you sabotaged needed change in your life because of anxiety? What were you afraid of losing?
7. The sermon invites us to "pay attention" this week to where we feel the tightest grip. What specific practice could help you notice this—journaling, a daily prayer walk, setting a phone reminder to pause and reflect?
8. Jesus promises the Spirit as our advocate, counselor, and comforter through the pruning process. How can you actively invite the Holy Spirit into a specific area where you sense pruning is needed?

### **Group Discussion:**

If you are studying with others, discuss your reflections and insights.

1. Share about a time when God pruned something from your life that you initially resisted. Looking back, how did that pruning lead to new growth or fruit?
2. The sermon reminds us that the disciples had to wait between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, sitting in the "in-between" space, trusting God's promise. When have you experienced a waiting period where you had to trust what you couldn't yet see? How did God meet you in that space?

### **Closing Prayer:**

“Faithful God, thank you for the promise that you will not leave us orphaned. We confess that pruning is hard and change makes us anxious. Help us trust that you are the vine grower who knows exactly what we need to bear fruit. Give us courage to release what we're clinging to and faith to believe that your Spirit will guide us through the uncomfortable work of transformation. We surrender to your loving hands. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

### **Journal Prompt:**

*Complete this sentence and then write freely for 5-10 minutes:*

*"The area of my life where I feel the tightest grip right now is... When I imagine releasing this to God, I feel... What I need from the Holy Spirit in this process is..."*

