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## “I Am” Series: I Am the True Vine

**Goal:** The goal for today is that you **stand firm** to the end.

John 16:1 ESV: “I have said all these things [all of chapter 15] to you to keep you from falling away.”

- Ask yourself: What does Jesus mean here by the phrase “fall away”?
  - Jesus is speaking to his disciples.
- And be thinking: *What was said in John 15 (“all these things”) to keep his disciples from falling away?*

Matthew 24:9-14 NIV “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away [ESV uses fall away] from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

### 1. The first way to stand firm to the end is to stay aligned with Jesus

- Do you know that you have been grafted into Christ? (Romans 11)
  - And every day I need to stay aligned with his priorities, his mission, and his ways by spending time in prayer, reading his word, and meeting with his people.
- Which is why Jesus says:
  - John 15:1, 4-5 ESV “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser [...] 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.
- The act of abiding is receiving and trusting in all that Christ is for us and has for us.
  - The result is life-giving sap.
- **Life giving sap**
  - **Words** (v 7) “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
    - Jesus wants His words to abide in you which results in right thinking and right action = **fruit**
      - Fruit is God-glorifying desires or action
        - John 15:8 ESV “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”
      - The result is life-giving sap
    - **Love** (v 9-10) “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.”
    - **Joy** (v 11) “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”
  - So alignment with Jesus through abiding leads us to have a steady stream of Jesus’s words, love, and joy in our lives which produces fruit (desires and action) that please God, and this is what it means and how to stand firm to the end!

### 2. The second way to stand firm to the end is to see pruning for what it really is.

John 15:2,6 ESV “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 [...] 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.”

- First, a non-fruit-bearing branch is cut off and burned.
- Secondly, every branch that does bear fruit he prunes.
  - You cannot escape pruning!
  - The parallel in the Christian life is that God is going to remove good things from your life because they take 1) time, 2) energy, 3) thought, 4) talents [slow] that could be used where he wants them used.
  - One of the most detrimental obstacles to the best thing in your life is a whole bunch of other good things, and so He is willing to cut them out of you

- Philippians 3:8 ESV “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”
- Now when you are pruned you have a choice
  - Fight the pruner and resist.
    - “You are making a mistake!”
  - Submit to the pruner.
    - God knows what you need to have removed so that all of his life-giving sap (words, love, and joy) are going to where the best fruit will be made.
- But remember this, God’s removal of things in our lives is to help us stand firm to the end.
  - Don’t get distracted.
  - Don’t waste precious time or energy.
  - Stay focused on the goal...
    - “I chose you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide”
- Take who Jesus is... all 7 I AM statements and be on mission to the whole world.

### 3. The third way to stand firm to the end is to have Biblical expectations for life

- If your expectation is that knowing and following Jesus will mean ease, comfort, and people liking you then when difficulty, risk, and hatred comes your way you will be tempted to think that Christianity is a sham and walk away.
  - So remembering Jesus’s promises of suffering and persecution is a means to standing firm to the end.
    - John 15:18, 20b ESV “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you [...] If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you [...] Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. [...] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.”
- You want to stand firm to the end... cultivate realistic Biblical ideas about suffering
- And memorize these passages to preach to yourself truth in the midst of suffering

#### Conclusion:

- Don’t shortcut your training and equipping.
- Stand firm - your trainer knows what he is doing.

**For Small Group Discussion:** What have you learned from the “I Am” series?

**Opening Question:** Gardening experience: What have you failed at or been successful in growing?

**Main Point:** After Jesus has declared who He is, we are charged to share the truth of His identity with a hostile world. God provides the Holy Spirit to help and sustain us through persecution.

**Main Scripture:** John 15 (**Additional Scripture:** Galatians 5:22-23, Romans 10:14-15)

#### Questions:

1. Why does God prune us?
2. What is Jesus preparing His followers to experience? How is He preparing them?
3. What or who helps you to remain in the vine?
4. How has obedience played a role in your spiritual growth?
5. In light of all seven of Jesus’ “I Am” statements, who is God identifying in your life that needs to know Jesus in this way?
6. What support do you need in order to persevere in the midst of persecution?

**Tips and Resources:** *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

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