

## **“Mentors and Motivators”**

**John 15:1-8**

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### **Communion Devotion**

Let's talk about grapes this morning. It is appropriate we do so since we are going to take communion and our text alludes to them.

Why did Jesus mention vines, branches and a gardener in this passage? It was his custom to use common images to get a point across to those listening.

In this portion of the farewell discourses, spoken just hours before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus referred to the necessity of branches and vines staying connected in order to bear fruit, in this case, grapes. He also emphasized the role of the gardener who would nurture, nourish and prune the branches so the grapes could grow. I can see the disciples shaking their heads in agreement as Jesus taught, no doubt recalling the words of the prophets who often employed the same imagery.

You may have grapes on your property. My grandparents did. When I heard preachers talk about vines and branches, or to this day when I read a text like this, I think of walking with my grandmother on a summer day to the trellises in her back yard to pick grapes.

Of course, I would eat some of them as we filled up our containers, but I was careful to leave plenty for the jelly she would make. I knew when I smelled biscuits cooking that the jelly was ready. Is there anything better than a hot biscuit smothered in butter with jelly oozing out the sides? I can't think of anything right now!

Yes, grapes were plentiful in Jesus' time, and still are in Palestine. Trust me, though, they make more than jelly with their grapes. Come to think of it, my grandmother may have, too.

**What do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that evening as they gathered in the Upper Room?** You are ahead of me, aren't you? He wanted to emphasize the importance of their staying connected as they continued the work they had begun. As the branches needed the vines, so they needed him.

I am intrigued by Jesus' use of the word **abide** in this text and the number of times he said it, eight all together. **Why did he do this?**

He wanted them to know his death would not be the end of his life nor the end their relationship. By God's grace and power, he would live again beyond the grave and they could remain connected through the Holy Spirit.

He also wanted them to know it was up to them to maintain and cultivate this relationship with him. If they did not, they would drift apart, which would break his heart.

**Why did Jesus feel it so important they stay connected to him?** He knew they would need his help to be the people they needed to be and do the work he called them to do. They could not do either of these without him.

With him, however, they could live a life which would reflect the gracious heart and loving nature of God, and they could make room in their lives for those who were struggling, offering encouragement and help.

**What do you need Jesus' help with today?** What is your biggest struggle or challenge? What relentless temptation is nipping at your heels? What relationship needs to be improved or addiction needs to be overcome? What are you worried about and losing sleep over? What is robbing you of your joy or sending you into despair?

**How do you connect with Jesus and draw nourishment and strength from him?** You open your heart to him and talk to him like any other friend. Unburden your heart and seek his guidance. Trust him as you would a loving and responsible parent and cultivate that vital relationship through constant contact.

**Who else do you need to be connected to as you deal with life's challenges?** I think the best way to answer this is to answer another question. **What do you need from others at this time in your life?**

Do you need someone who can bring the best out in you and help you achieve your potential?

Do you need someone who will nudge you out of your comfort zone and encourage you to travel down new roads?

Do you need someone who will believe in you when you have lost confidence in yourself?

Do you need someone who will be honest with you about your shortcomings and hold you accountable as you address them?

Do you need someone who will help you get rid of the destructive traits which are harming you and those around you?

Do you need someone who will offer wise counsel as you grapple with the mysteries of life and faith?

Do you need someone who will love you unconditionally and forgive you when you make mistakes?

At the same time, do you need someone who will love you too much to let you keep making excuses for not changing your behavior?

Do you need someone who will pick you up when you fall and help you pick up the shattered pieces of your life?

Do you need someone who will walk with you out of the cemetery of broken dreams and help you rebuild your life?

Do you need someone who will be there in your darkest hours and pray with you?

We all do, don't we, and once we realize this, we are then ready to answer the question I asked earlier: **Who else do you need at this time in your life?**

Would this be loving family members, faithful friends, wise mentors, experienced teachers and fellow believers? What role could they play in your life now? Could they provide sound advice, encouragement, inspiration and strength?

As we gather around this table, I believe it would benefit you to examine your relationships. Who are you currently connected to who brings the best out in you? Who does just the opposite? Who's missing in your life? What do you need to do to develop and cultivate healthy relationships?

**On the other hand, who needs you in their life at this time?** Who do you need to "make room for," as we talked about last week? Whose life would be strengthened because they are connected to you?

Aren't we glad Jesus made room for us? What a difference he is making in our lives. Will you let him use you to do the same for someone in your life?