Rooted – Part 3

GROW DEEP, LIVE STRONG

# Prune

## (John 15:1-10)

This morning we are continuing our series entitled, “Rooted,” and we have been talking about being planted, growing deeper and stronger in the environment where we are rooted so that we would be fruitful, producing fruit for God’s kingdom. This is so important because God’s purpose for you is to be connected, engaged, and making a difference in your circle of influence. And so, for you and I to be like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, and whatever we do prospers; we must remain steadfast (Psalm 1:3).

Now, last week we talked about growth and how it is God who brings growth because his desire is for each believer, each member of the body of Christ, to be healthy, growing, and producing fruit for his kingdom.

This week, week three of our series, I want to talk to you about another aspect of being rooted and experiencing growth called pruning. Like many aspects of our faith journey, pruning isn’t always easy, but it’s necessary in order for healthy new growth to occur. Pruning is defined as,

“To trim (a tree, shrub, or bush) by cutting away dead or overgrown branches or stems, especially to increase fruitfulness and growth.”

And so, just as a tree is healthier after being pruned, as believers we experience growth, increased fruitfulness, when those unhealthy areas of our lives are trimmed or cut away. And even though this process may be painful in the moment, we must remain steadfast because the Bible says,

“The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10).

In other words, you don’t have to be worried about the growth, because God is going to make sure that you are strong, firm and steadfast, he’s going to make you fruitful, you just need to make sure that you are rooted.

I’m going to show this to you in the Word of God today because this is going to bless you and encourage you. As you turn in your Bibles to John chapter 15, we’re going to learn some principles that are going to help you remain steadfast in this season of social distancing and isolation. This statement that we are going to read is rather dramatic and when you consider the context it takes on a whole different level of significance for us. You see, this is just part of a conversation that Jesus has with his disciples which began in chapter 13 and continues to chapter 18. And so, the statement we are about to read was made as he was having dinner with the disciples in what is known as the Last Supper, because this was his last meal with them before he was arrested and crucified.

As we listen to this conversation, we need to remember that Jesus knows he is about to die; and so as he sits down at the table with his friends this one last time, these are his final words to them. These are things that he needs them to know because they are the foundation of the church and he is depending on them to establish the New Testament church. And so, in this discourse he is imparting to them last-minute principles and ideas that will help them be a true representation of what he was about to give his life for. And immediately following this meal he will go out to the garden of Gethsemane to pray before he is arrested and taken away to be crucified.

That is the context in which Jesus says in John chapter 15, verse one,

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener” (John 15:1).

We’ve been talking about being rooted in this series and it is interesting to note the agricultural imagery, not just in this passage, but in the Word of God. From the garden of Eden, to the garden of Gethsemane, and to the tree of life in the book of Revelation. From Genesis to Revelation and everything in between, we find God using agricultural images to explain spiritual truth.

God is teaching us about seed, planting, growth, consistency, and faithfulness. I am the vine, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies,

“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Genesis 8:22).

And the reason why God uses these agricultural terms and images is because these principles are binding and permanent, they are unchangeable, and so Jesus tells us, “I am the vine and my Father is the gardener.” In other words, God is faithful, he is and always has been planting and growing because he intends for there to be fruitfulness in all that he created.

The Father is a gardener, and he plants things in our lives, desiring to grow things in our lives, things that don’t naturally grow there but have to be planted. On the other hand, there are things growing up in your life that look like natural vegetation, things that are growing wild, thorns that choke the plant making it unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). And so, God plants a seed and suddenly something is coming up out of the ground, but it’s not understood, it’s not appreciated, and it’s lonely because it’s planted in a hostile environment.

Some of you have begun to grow in your family, your neighborhood, or your workplace, thinking, talking, and doing things that are contradictory to your environment, to the culture where God intends for you to stand out and be fruitful. And it’s not easy, it’s uncomfortable, you may feel like you’re being choked, you’re being silenced, but you were planted. The Bible says,

“A planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor” (Isaiah 61:3).

And so, none of this is accidental, because God is a gardener, Jesus is the vine, and you are the branches. You were planted, no matter where you were born, or what kind of situation or circumstances you may find yourself in, you were not a mistake because God meant for you to be there.

In fact, the Bible says, “Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Romans 8:29). And so, regardless of how you feel, or others feel about you, God foreknew you, predetermined and preordained for you to be planted where you are. You were planted with the intention of being conformed to the likeness of his Son Jesus Christ and bearing much fruit. And Jesus continues in verse two, telling us that his Father,

“Cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2).

And so, Jesus is describing the relationship that he has with each of his followers. It’s not just casual and disconnected, he’s not just a friend with benefits, it’s not always going to be convenient, but he says you have to be in me, intertwined and connected so that you bear much fruit.

One thing that Jesus makes very clear is that everybody is going to get cut, some people will get cut back, and some people will get cut off, but nobody goes without being cut. For some of you that is good news because you don’t need to worry about those people in your life that are not real, not connected, not invested, and aren’t bearing any fruit. Everybody is going to go through pruning and the Father knows exactly who to cut away and who to leave in. The Gardener knows who needs some trimming and who need to be cut away. You see, one will be cut to throw away and the other is cut so that they will become more fruitful.

If you are here today, or if you’re watching online, and you want to grow, you need to recognize that fruitfulness comes through times in your life when you were cut back. Now, I know we don’t really like this kind of teaching, but this was important, Jesus had to teach his disciples this before he left. They needed to know that what really causes you to grow in the Christian life is when you patiently endure pruning. It’s when you have been cut back, things have been cut off, that you are finally able to grow and be fruitful. That’s why the Bible says,

“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:3-5).

And so, it’s the suffering, the painful and frustrating times where you’re just struggling to persevere that cause you to grow.

And if you are growing, even if your life is fruitful, God will reward you by pruning you so that you bear more fruit. Now, you may be wondering what kind of reward that is, because that doesn’t even make sense, unless you’re familiar with gardening. You see, the Bible says,

“The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Hebrews 12:6).

And so, God prunes us because he loves us, he cuts us back because he loves us too much to allow us to be content producing this much fruit when he created us to produce so much more. You see, some of us may feel like we are fruitful, but we have a tendency to become satisfied with average, satisfied with enough, instead of really discovering our potential.

Of course, pruning is not easy, it can be painful, because you will suffer loss, cutting back fruitful branches so that you might bring forth more fruit. And that’s why we need to know this and be submissive to the pruning process so that we can prosper, going from fruit to more fruit, and ultimately much fruit. And so, Jesus goes even deeper and says in verse three,

“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

Now, it sounds like he’s changing subjects, but he’s really describing the process. In other words, he’s preparing us for fruitfulness, he says I gave you a bath by the power of my word, you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you, and he continues in verse four,

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4).

Jesus says, remain, remain, remain, remain. Four times he says it, we keep hearing it over and over again. In other words, just get to one place and stay there, be steadfast and immovable, because you’ve got to stick to one thing long enough to be fruitful.

We need to pay careful attention to this because there is an order to what Jesus is saying. He tells us to remain in him after he has brought up pruning, and so he’s calling us to be faithful, to remain even when it’s difficult, even when it’s painful, even when you can’t see the benefit of remaining. And so, we’ve got to learn to be so committed and focused on what God has called us to do that we remain steadfast even when life is the most painful. You’ve got to hang on, enduring and fighting back, because you can’t be fruitful if you don’t remain rooted.

Jesus continues in verse five saying, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Now, I don’t know if you noticed or not, but we have increased exponentially. We went from fruit, to more fruit, too much fruit, but we can only see that kind of fruitfulness if we remain. And so, Jesus wants you to understand, that you didn’t get here by yourself, you can’t do this by yourself, you can’t hold it together by yourself, and he says, without me you can do nothing. And so, we want to come to the understanding that without him we can do nothing and the admission of that fact, admitting our own limitations, humbling ourselves before God, puts us in a place where we are finally ready to hear from him.

Now remember Jesus is getting ready to leave his disciples, physically departing, he’s going to be crucified, and he says without me you can do nothing. In other words, I’m going to be with you in spirit, I won’t be with you in the way I was with you, but I will be with you, all you have to do is remain in me. And so, you let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'. You’ve got to be faithful; you’ve got to remain steadfast, you’ve got to stick around.

You see, sometimes we find ourselves feeling frustrated and ready to give up, but we are not the gardener, we are just branches. And so, we just need to stay connected, remaining steadfast, trusting that God knows when we’ve matured enough to handle more fruit. God knows when you’ve grown enough that he can bless you with more privilege, more opportunities, and more responsibility. Until then all you have got to do is remain in him, just show up every day, and do what Jesus told you to do:

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (John 15:4).

That’s it, that’s all you’ve got to do, but we tend to complicate things.

Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and God the Father is the gardener; he is overseeing our fruitfulness, and so we just need to trust him with the process. Then Jesus takes us even deeper in verse six saying,

“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6).

In other words, if you don’t remain in him, if you get distracted, if you get detoured and wander off on your own, he says you are “like a branch that is thrown away and withers.” And so, you want to remain steadfast, you want to be connected, you want to remain in the vine being as close as you can be because God is gracious. He knows where and when to prune you, he knows how to correct you, and so you want to remain in him.

And then, Jesus gives us this amazing promise, which taken at face value often causes people to stumble, but if you go deeper and understand the grace of God in this one verse, it’s both humbling and mind-boggling. Verse seven says,

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7).

Now, how could God give you or promise you that you can ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you? Well, the power in this promise is found in the first part of the statement. “If you remain in me and my words remain in you.” In other words, you’ve got to stick around, because he’s not going to give it to you when you’re a baby. He’s not going to give you that kind of power until you’re mature enough to handle it.

And so, it’s a conditional promise, if you remain in me, if you mature, if you stick around. You see, he knew if he had given it to you too early you would have asked, the Bible says,

“With wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:3).

He says, the desires within you cause you to kill and covet, quarrel and fight, asking for something you can’t have because you can’t handle it. But God wanted to trust you with power, taking you to another level of kingdom authority, so that you could approach him with the confidence:

“That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

This is the kind of power where you can ask anything according to his will because his Word remains in you. And so, the Lord is telling his disciples that you have finally come to a place of maturity in your life that now you can ask, verse seven,

“Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7).

Because you’ve got enough of my Word in you. And so, the real mystery to unraveling this text before us today, is to get enough of the Word of God to remain in you, that it will change what you ask for. You see, if you don’t get enough of his Word in you, you will ask with wrong motives, because you will ask according to the flesh. But if you remain in Christ and his words remain in you, it will change the desires of your heart, it will change what you ask for, because it will change what matters to you.

I wish there were some of you today who would be bold enough to believe it. Who would get this Word down deep into your heart so that it would change you, repeating this to yourself, memorizing it,

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7).

You see, this wasn’t new, the Lord was just revisiting an old promise, one that would have been familiar to the disciples. He said, I will give it to you in Deuteronomy chapter 6,

“A land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant…” (Deuteronomy 6:10-11).

And so, he is saying if you remain in me and my word remains in you, it will be given to you, and you won’t even have to work for it.

If you will allow this Word into your heart, it will change the way you think, changing the way you live, changing what you want and what you ask for. But you’ve got to grow to another level, remaining in him, and his words remaining in you. And I’ll tell you, there were things I would’ve asked for 20 years ago, but there’s something about maturity, because priorities become more important than comfort. And so, I’m content to remain in him, I’ve grown to another level, and I don’t even want what I thought would’ve given me joy back then.

And so, Jesus says, “ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” And this word is exciting, because Jesus is telling us that,

“The tongue has the power of life and death” (Proverbs 18:21).

And all of a sudden, it’s connecting deep in our souls, and we recognize that in some mysterious way God wants to speak through us. He’s giving us an invitation to speak the Word, releasing the power of God in our lives, inviting us to, “Say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move" (Matthew 17:20).

It can happen, nothing will be impossible, but I don’t want to get too excited because Jesus says in verse eight,

“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

And so, your faith, your growing, your prayers, you’re asking, your fruitfulness glorifies God, and he’s proud of you when you show yourself to be his disciples. His desire is for you to be fruitful and he wants to give you supernatural increase, but you have to remain in him, you have to be rooted, you have to remain steadfast, you have to be “planted” flourishing in the house of God (Psalms 92:13).

And that’s why God will use anything in our lives to shape us into the people that he wants us to be. If there’s something in our lives that is unhealthy, God will cut it away. If there’s something in our lives that is good, but it’s keeping us from experiencing better, God will prune it. And so, the gardener prunes these things so that we may have a better opportunity to grow, remaining connected to him, growing deep roots that will sustain us when the wind blows, remaining steadfast when it floods, remaining in him and his Word remaining in us.

That is his will, his desire for you, and Jesus says this in the ninth verse:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love” (John 15:9-10).

In closing, remain in his love, remain in his word, remain in your faith, just remain steadfast. Entrust yourself into the hands of the divine gardener, even though the process of pruning can be painful, he knows what he is doing and you will be fruitful in his hands. Remain in him through adversity, through trial and hardship. Remain connected to the vine because apart from him you can do nothing. Let’s pray.

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