

A RETURN TO THE VINEYARD

(John 15:1-11)

TO KEEP GROWING, DO YOUR JOB AND LET GOD DO HIS

- **Our job is REMAINING CONNECTED**

I am the true vine.... Remain connected to me, and I will remain connected to you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain connected to the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain connected to me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains connected to me and I to him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.... If you remain connected to me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain connected to my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain connected to my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain connected to his love. (1, 4-5, 7, 9-10)

The self-discipline of remaining connected is necessary because of who we are. We are branches, people with an intimate and dependent relationship with Jesus, the vine. We cannot grow unless we draw strength from the vine. Without remaining connected, we wither.

- **God's job is PRUNING**

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he **prunes [cleanses]** so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already **clean [pruned]** because of the word I have spoken to you. (1-3)*

God's will is that we grow, not remain stagnant or wither. Our greatest growth comes through pruning. God's primary set of pruning shears is his word, but we must be *in* it to be pruned by it. He also uses people and circumstances to prune us, especially difficult ones.

- **The result is BEARING FRUIT, like JOY**

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains connected to me and I to him, he will **bear much fruit**; apart from me you can do nothing.... This is to my Father's glory, that you **bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples.... I have told you this so that my **joy** may be in you and that your **joy** may be complete. (5, 8, 11)*

The result of remaining connected to the vine and being pruned by the gardener is that we bear fruit and see others benefit from us. One fruit highlighted in John 15 is joy, but in the New Testament, all the following are called *fruit*: bringing others to Christ (Rom 1:13), moral purity (Rom 6:22), sharing (Rom 15:28), good works (Col 1:10), praise and thanks (Heb 13:15), and godly character qualities (Gal 5:22-23). They all share at least one thing: fruit is intended for others.

FOR DISCUSSION—Choose one topic and answer those two questions

REMAINING CONNECTED

1. What are the greatest challenges you face to remaining connected?
2. What do you need or what could you do to meet these challenges and remain connected more consistently?

BEING PRUNED

3. Where and how have you been pruned in the past and when did you realize it?
4. Where and how might you be being pruned presently and how are you responding?

BEARING FRUIT

5. What fruit do you think God may want to produce in you and through you?
6. For whom and for what might God be producing this fruit?