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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**December 4, 2016**

**The Vine and the Branches**

**John 15:1-6**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again, we are so thankful that we can go tell it on the mountain. That's the incredible story of Christmas. And we are just so grateful and thankful for the gift of your birth and we are so thankful for the gift of the cross. The cross is what we focus on on this day in particular. And so we pray, Lord, as we are focused on what you have done for us on the cross that we may have again the presence of your Holy Spirit, guide us, speak to us, speak through your word, again give us the ability to know you better and to love you deeper. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once again this is the first Sunday of the month, this is our communion Sunday and again this is the day that we remember Christ and the cross. And Jesus on the night before he died met with his disciples for the very last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them and we hear that and see that in Matthew 26 where it says this, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said,*

*"Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they could symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And he also asked them to remember this on a regular basis and we call that the Lord's table and we celebrate it once a month. And we celebrate it by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus did on the cross and by examining ourselves, and again that means asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our life where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

We've been following the life of Jesus and we finally made it to the 15th chapter of the gospel of John. And this part opens up with a lengthy story about the vine and the branches. Jesus loved teaching in metaphors and in this story of the vine and the branches we have the entire Godhead represented. Let me just start

at *John 15:1*, it says -- this is Jesus saying: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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 even more fruit."* And then verse 5 which says: *"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."* Well, this is the entire Godhead. Jesus describes himself as the vine, he describes us believers as the branches, his Father is the vinedresser and the Holy Spirit is the living water that is flowing through those branches. Back in *John 7*, Jesus said this about the Holy Spirit, he said: *"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Now this metaphor of the vine and the branches works perfectly because it so well describes God's will for his children. What he's telling us is that we are the branches and we are connected to the vine by faith. And when we are connected to the vine by faith, we have flowing through us the living waters of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus made it very clear that the health and vitality of any tree or vine is always determined by the fruit that it bears. He

said this in *Matthew 7:17*, he said: "So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

Well, here's the big question. What is the fruit that Jesus is speaking of here? I would have to say to the extent that you understand this answer, to the extent that you understand the metaphor that Jesus is using is the extent that you understand really what your life is all about. I mean because literally in these two sentences Jesus is giving us the reason why we're here. He's explaining what life is all about for us. Jesus is the vine and we by faith are part of that vine as branches. Now the only way that you can tell if the Holy Spirit is alive within us as the living water that's flowing within us is to look at the end of the branches and examine what kind of fruit you find there. And it's not grapes and it's not oranges, it's -- the fruit is actually another metaphor. *Galatians 5:22* says: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* Now this shouldn't be a surprise to us because we spent a lot of time looking at the gospel of John, looking into the fruit of the Spirit. And one of the things that we discovered is that

the fruit is best understood by looking at a typical type of fruit like a grape or an orange, 'cause the fruit itself that's hanging on that vine or that tree, you can look at that fruit and say that fruit itself represents love, but like a grape -- a grapefruit or an orange, if you open it up, you can see that it's made of lots of little wedges. The actual unified whole contains lots of little subparts. The wedges that make up the fruit are: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness and self-control. You look at that and say, now who in the world wouldn't want to have those characteristics as part of their own lives? I mean, they really are what defines an attractive person. But there's a big difference between the fruit of the Spirit that Jesus is talking about and just being a patient or kind or gentle person. And the difference is that the fruit of the Spirit always relates back to Christ. And what Jesus is telling us is that we are on this earth as branches connected to Him and we are charged with the task of reproducing in ourselves by the power of that Holy Spirit living water that is flowing within us, the very essence of who Christ is. What Jesus is looking to see reproduced in us is the love of Christ, is the joy of Christ, is the patience of Christ, is all the other fruits of Christ because all together all of these fruits represent the loveliness of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is a living embodiment of the loveliness of Christ, and God is determined to grow that fruit in you and me. I mean if you think

about the -- there's a scripture that we say over and over and over again that we repeat endlessly because it's probably one of the most important scriptures in all of the Bible. It's *Romans 8:28*. Let me just read it to you. It says: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* And we notice in this passage that God is the one who defines what the "good" is that all things work together for. And as we've said many, many times, despite what the prosperity preachers tell us, it's not health, it's not wealth, it's not prosperity, it's what God says it is, and what God says is the "good" is conformity to the image of his Son. When God says all things work together for good, he means that every single event in our lives, as what the Greek language refers to as a "telos" and what that really means is that everything in our lives has a goal, it's got a desire, it's pointed in one specific direction. And God says every single event in the life of his chosen ones is directed towards shaping and molding them into the unique image of his son Jesus Christ. And I've said this many, many times, it is unique. You cannot represent the image of Jesus Christ like I can, and I can't like you can, because each of us uniquely represent the image of Christ, and so in that way bring glory to God.

And so the big question is, all right, how do we do that? How do we bear that fruit? How are you and I conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, God's son? Well, part of that, a huge part of that is fruit bearing. We glorify God by manifesting his character and his attributes. And what that means is that the way that we live our lives is going to demonstrate and it's going to demonstrate to our neighbors around us and also to the spirit world something unique about who God is, about what he is like and how he has affected our lives. I mean the reason we exist, I've said this many, many times is we exist to be walking, living billboards about the character of who God is. And God calls that fruit bearing. And we bear fruit the same way a vine bears fruit. And like any vine or tree, the quality is demonstrated, it's manifested, and it's revealed not by the roots, not by the vine itself and not by the branches, it's revealed only by the fruit. And when we studied the Gospel of John, we studied the whole idea of fruit bearing, and I referred to it with a very fancy Latin term. The Latin term is "sine qua non." You can impress your friends by saying, "That there's a sine qua non." That's really not that impressive but it's a Latin phrase and it's a Latin phrase that sounds impressive but the sentence really means "without which not." And it's basically saying if you don't have this, you can't do that. You know, one of the ways that you could look at, you can say if you're a politician today, then a thick skin is a sine qua non. You have

to have a thick skin. Well fruit bearing for a Christian is a sine qua non. It's a without which not. And that means that for a Christian, if you bear no fruit, well then by definition you are not a Christian. You see, Jesus Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would be a river flowing within us, and when God's Holy Spirit flows within us, you cannot help but produce fruit.

Now as the elders begin distributing the bread, I want to continue kind of pushing this metaphor. As a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, you are not just a person, you are a branch and you are attached to a vine through which God's Holy Spirit is now flowing, producing fruit. Now if you have none of that drive, none of that drive to bear fruit, then by definition, God's Holy Spirit is not flowing within you and you are a dead branch and you are waiting to be gathered up and burned. See, I don't think I can over-emphasize how critical the idea of fruit bearing is to the life of a believer. It is what we are here for. It's why God put us on this earth. Listen to how Jesus puts this in John 15:16. He's speaking to the disciples but it applies just as well to every one of his own. He says: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."* God is telling us that fruit bearing is what defines our lives. You know, we think for the most part that our success or our failure in life is really tied into the standard



metrics of success in our culture. You need to go to school, and you need to study hard so that you can get a good job so that you can afford to raise your family in relative comfort so that they can grow and have their kids and do the exact same thing until the cycle just repeats itself endlessly. So if you're successful, now your kids will raise their kids and they'll do the very same thing and that's not a bad thing. But it's not the only thing.

Somewhere along the way you just might ask yourself the question that Solomon asked in *Ecclesiastes 1*, he said this: *"What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."*

Jesus is telling us something altogether different. And what Christ is telling us in our text this morning is that our lives here on earth are going to be successful or not based on a

completely different metric. You see, according to Christ, it depends not on our ability to toil endlessly at essentially the same task that every other generation has toiled at, but rather it depends on the quantity and the quality of the fruit we produce as we go about the task that every generation has been caught up with. You see, our success at life is not a matter of building a successful home or job or career or family, but rather it's the fruit we bear as we go about the task of building a home, a job, a career or a family. And I honestly believe that to the extent that you understand fruit bearing will be the extent that your life will be a success eternally.

So how do we go about the task of bearing fruit? Well, there's only one way to really bear fruit, and Jesus is quite clear about what that one way is. He says in *John 15*: "*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.*" Jesus is very clear that the only way to grow fruit is by abiding in Jesus. And what he's saying is you don't grow the fruit of patience by trying to be more patient; you grow it by abiding in Jesus. You don't grow joy by trying to be more joyful; you grow it by abiding in Jesus. And you know, I put it this way many, many

times before, Jesus is basically saying that the more that you hang around me, the more I am going to wear off on you, the more like me you're going to become. And this is exactly what we saw happen in the book of Acts. You know, we have Peter and John, not exactly refined gentlemen when Jesus first called them into the kingdom, these were fisherman, this was a rough bunch. This is not people that were known for their gentility and their civility. But the more they abided in Jesus, the more they were around him, the more Jesus wore off on them and the more like Jesus they became, so much so that Luke said in Acts 4:13: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

You know, communion is the perfect time to ask ourselves that question. It's an important question and the question is this: Do the folks around you, do they recognize that you've been with Jesus? I mean, have you hung around him enough so that he has started to rub off on you? Consider also the warning that God gives about communion itself. God says this in 1 Corinthians 11:28, he says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick*

among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. You know, I say this every month and it's important to repeat that communion is incredibly serious business, and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. And what I say is that if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King or if you have some kind of sin issue that you know that you have to deal with, if you first need to be reconciled with your brother by dealing with something and bringing your sacrifice to the altar afterwards, then don't take the elements. Just don't. On the other hand, we can make the mistake of thinking that unless we are absolutely flawless in our approach to the king that we are unworthy, and that, too, is a mistake. You know, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you never sin. It doesn't mean that you never fail. It means that you recognize that we have within us God's Holy Spirit convicting us of those sins, and that nobody is ever whatsoever on their own capable of earning salvation because it is a gift. And as Dane Ortlund puts it and we repeat it each month, he says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." But you know, it also means that when we do fail we are aware that we've sinned and we are aware of it because God's Spirit is within us, and it is

God's Spirit convicting us, and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King does not mean that we are without sin. It means that when we sin, we understand we have an advocate with the Father. An advocate is someone who speaks out on our behalf. In *1 John 2:1*, it says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin, but if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* You see, it's because we have Jesus Christ and his righteousness, not our own, it's because of his righteousness that we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he bought for you. You know, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death that we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven, again, not based on our righteousness but based on his. And so as we're about to take the elements, we want to just take a moment to ask ourselves, am I abiding in Christ? And is my abiding in Christ producing that fruit that others around me have seen; he, she has been with Jesus. Ask yourself that question for a moment.

*1 Corinthians 11:23* says: *For I received from the Lord what I also*

*delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.*

I want to focus on one little statement that Jesus made in our scripture this morning. He said this in *John 15*. He said: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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."* Well, Jesus is describing two different actions on the part of his Father who he describes as the vinedresser. And the first thing he says is the vinedresser takes away any branches that do not bear fruit. Says he takes them away, but that's not the end of it. The actual language is far worse than that. Jesus speaks of -- of unfruitful branches as those that don't abide in him and those branches represent false believers. Jesus said: *"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."* Now understand there's a distinction here. This is not God's punishment for those branches that are lousy fruit producers. This is God's acknowledgment that those branches were never, never a part of the vine. Jesus spoke before of unbelievers and false believers, ones who thought that they were actually connected to the vine when they

weren't, and this is what he judged them by, again, their fruit. Listen to what he says in *Matthew 7*, he says: *"Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' and then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

Those are arguably the worst words human ears can ever hear. And it raises a question for every one of us and the question is: How do I know if I'm a believer trying to sort out what it means to be a fruit bearer or a dead branch headed for the fire? Well, I think the answer to that is actually kind of simple. Simple but profound in a way. And the answer is this: Dead branches don't care. They don't care that they're dead because they don't realize that they're dead, and they don't know that they're dead because they don't care enough to know what alive means. Sometimes they're just too busy being religious to know. You know, the religious leaders in *Matthew 7* that we just read, they were classic examples. These were people who never questioned their own thoughts, their motives or their actions because they didn't care. I mean they were too busy doing religious things to even question themselves. And you

know over the last forty or fifty years, it's been sort of a subtext in the evangelical community that you're never supposed to question your salvation. That's a no-no. Well, I don't see that in scripture. In fact, I see the opposite; God insists that we do. We just read a couple of minutes ago a passage that says in *1 Corinthians 11: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* And then Paul in *2 Corinthians 13* gets even more specific, he says this, he says: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* Paul flat out tells us examine yourself. And what is the test? The test is whether or not Christ, the Spirit of Christ, the living water, is flowing within you.

And so the question that we really have to have to ask ourselves this morning is do I care enough to ask myself the most important questions, not just the ones about home and career but the ones about the kingdom of God. Is the Spirit of Christ in you moving you to produce his fruit? You know *James 4:14* says: *What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.* You know, James tells us that our lives are a mist that just appear and are gone in a flash, and many of us see that happening right before our eyes. I want my life to count forever,



and bearing the fruit of Christ counts forever.

Which leads me to the second part of our scripture this morning and that's Jesus in *John 15* says: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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."* See, the vinedresser takes away the branches that bear no fruit but the branches that do bear, he prunes. And pruning is painful. The vinedresser prunes to shape and mold the vine away from its natural tendencies. You know, we've all seen what natural grapevines look like. You've seen them snaking along telephone lines and going up trees and covering them with all kinds of big huge leaves and then if you poke in between the leaves, often times on those natural vines you see these shrunken, shriveled little groups of little grapes that are hanging there. Often times they're misshapen and they're bitter because natural grapes don't much care about producing grapes. They're really all about extending their range. Natural grapes put all of their energy into growing the vine. The vinedresser's job is to reshape the direction and the energy of the vine away from simply getting bigger and bigger to the production of fruit. You know, if you've ever gone around and you've seen a cultivated vineyard, you see usually there's a very thick, strong trunk and right coming out of the trunk usually four different ways are these tiny little

branches coming out of this great big trunk and that's because all of the new growth in that vine has been removed to force the plant to redirect its energy to the fruit. Often times when plants are put under stress, they redirect their energy towards the fruit. Maybe it's just a survival means but that's what they do. But I think in this, the spiritual implications are obvious. You see, our natural tendency is to focus on me. That's where we are, to make me grow bigger, whether it's in relationships or in career-making or homemaking or whatever it is that we do. And often times the vinedresser comes in with his pruning sheers and he cuts, and it hurts. The relationship ends, the job falls through, the diagnosis is not what you thought it would be. And sometimes it's just a matter of living life in a fallen world, but sometimes it's the discipline of the vinedresser. And what you have to understand about discipline is that God does it very differently than we do it. God does it perfectly. See, the vinedresser knows that fruit bearing is the very best thing that we can do and he's determined to redirect our energy toward that end, because he's already fully committed himself to us. We are the objects of his love. And he's determined to make us the very best we can be. And he's told us that he's chosen us from the beginning. And he tells us why he's chosen us in *Ephesians 1*, he says this: *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to*

*himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved. That's why we're here. You see, we praise his glorious grace by the fruit that we produce. And so the vinedresser is absolutely determined to give us the ability to produce that fruit.*

And it's critical to understand that God's discipline is never like human discipline in that it's never reactive. You know, we see our kids doing something wrong or something that's hurtful and hurtful to them and we react. But you see, God never, never reacts. God's never taken by surprise by our sin. Thousands of years before we were born, God saw every single sin you and I would ever commit for our entire lives; and in spite of that sin, he chose to fix his love on us. *Romans 5:8* says: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* God's discipline is settled because his love is settled and he has fixed his love on us and he has no intention of taking it off. And so his pruning, if you will, is designed to get us off our natural bend which is just like a wild vine and that is to grow me bigger and bigger, to grow me into more and more me. He wants to redirect and re-focus what really matters. And God says in no uncertain terms that this discipline is a function of his love. He says this in *Hebrews 12*, he says: *"For the Lord disciplines the ones he*

*loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I'd like us to consider the vinedresser as he goes about the task of pruning. And consider the fact that the vinedresser even pruned his own Son and his own Son's pruning was painful as well. You know, Jesus was never, ever focused on the me like we're focused on and yet his Father pruned him through suffering. *Hebrews 5:8* says: *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.* And I can't begin to imagine what Jesus's pruning was like, but towards the end of his public ministry, I can certainly guess that we humans were part of God's pruning process for his Son, that dealing with our constant sin and unbelief was a source of great pain and stress and frustration to Christ. You know, we've recently read a passage in John where Philip asked Jesus to simply show him and the rest of the disciples the Father, and he says, "that will be enough." And as we read that, we could sense Jesus's deep frustration that after three whole years of intimate contacts, his disciples still didn't realize that Jesus was the perfect expression of his Father. And I just look at that and I think, you know, Philip's question must

have cut like a knife or more appropriately, a pruning shear. Jesus said in *John 14*: "Have I been with you so long, and you still you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" That's the Father pruning the Son. In *Luke 9* Jesus comes down from a time of prayer to find that his disciples had tried and failed to somehow find the faith to exorcise a demon from a boy. And you can almost feel the frustration that Jesus has at their lack of faith. He says in *Luke 9:41*, he says: *Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."*

I just want to you take a moment to consider what the pruning experience for Jesus must have been like. Picture Jesus, he is the creator and the sustainer of the universe, he is upholding nanosecond by nanosecond the very molecules that make up every single part of this universe and he's doing it by the force of his power. He's the cosmic glue that holds atoms and galaxies together and for all time he has enjoyed the fellowship of the Father and the Spirit and he has given that up. He's become flesh and he has dwelt among us. And just because of that, I consider every single moment of Christ's experience on earth was a pruning experience and that Jesus used everything that he encountered to bring glory to his Father and so produce that fruit of the Spirit. And I picture

his patience and his kindness and his meekness and his gentleness flowing from the pruning that was done by the vinedresser. Picture him, he's been three years and he's living with his disciples in poverty and he's living in a creation that scorns and mocks and rejects him, and yet in obedience to his Father he presses forward. And like I said, my guess that in Jesus's life, much of his pruning was through those who were closest to him. My guess is that it was the disciples' faithlessness, selfishness and sin that vexed Jesus's very soul. And you know, the disciples represent us. One of their number even betrayed Jesus and it became yet another pruning experience. Jesus says in *John 13:21*: *After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."* That is extreme pruning. Hebrews tells us that Jesus was our high priest tempted in every way as we are but without sin. And we know that he learned obedience through suffering. And so we know that he was no stranger to heartache and to suffering. But the ultimate pruning, the ultimate stripping away of everything that Jesus had was the abandonment that he experienced on the cross. *Psalm 22* takes us into his mindset where he says: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest."* Even that Jesus used as a means to become even more fruitful, demonstrating his obedience in the face

of complete abandonment. And so in the midst of Jesus' deepest pain and shame and abandonment, he still finds the strength to place his faith and his trust in God. He goes on to say in *Psalm 22:3*: *Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.* We all know that it was three days before the truth of that was borne out in the resurrection. So we know that Jesus understood exactly what pruning was all about. And the more he suffered, the more he fixed his eyes on his Father and on the kingdom. And you know the pruning that takes place in our lives is designed for the exact same thing, the exact same end. *James 1* says: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

See, that's the mark of the vinedresser, that is the vinedresser altering our perception of what matters through the use of trials. And don't get caught up in the idea that every bit of discipline is punishment. Because discipline is unpleasant and oftentimes painful, it's often easy to think of it strictly as punishment but that's not necessarily so. Any professional athlete will tell you that the discipline he engages in is painful, that it's unpleasant,

but he would hardly call it punishment. And God says the exact same thing in *Hebrews 12:11*, he says: *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*

And so if you are experiencing right now a trial, it could be any number of things. Perhaps God is disciplining you to train you to prepare you for bigger and better things. Perhaps he is using the megaphone of pain to speak into your life something that needs to be addressed. And if that is, he won't keep you guessing. We have the Holy Spirit within us and God's Holy Spirit will speak to you about sin in your life that he wants you to deal with. But what God wants most for all of us is what his Son demonstrated over and over again. It's that every single thing we do, we do for the glory of God. And for us that means bearing the fruit that we were meant to bear and that necessitates us drawing close to Christ. You see, you can't have the love of Christ without drawing near to Christ. You can't have the love, the joy, the peace, the patience, the kindness, and all the other fruit without drawing near to the One who is the source of that fruit. And Jesus made that clear when he said in *John 15:3*: *"Apart from me you can do nothing."*



Jesus also made it clear that fruit bearing is the reason why we're here. He said: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."* Ask God this morning to speak to you about abiding in Him and about growing the fruit in your life.

1 Corinthians the 11th chapter, the 25th verse says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* So take, and drink.

This is our heart, hands and feet part, and I was -- I was just thinking about what I'm trying to get at here and I was -- I was asked, oh, a couple months ago, I was actually interviewed by Neal Wintermute at his church, and he said, "What do you consider to be your job, your primary job?" And I said, "My job is to help you fall deeper in love with Christ." And really that is the key to everything, because if you fall deep enough in love with Christ, then doing the work of the kingdom will never be work at all. I mean, I remember when I first fell in love with Janice. I mean, whatever she wanted to do, "Hey, what do you want to do?" "Let's scrape gum from the sidewalk." "Oh, that would be great! Let's do that." Because I was so in love, whatever it is that she wanted to do wasn't work at all. It was great. It was enjoyable. God wants

our love for him to be that kind of love, so full of passion, so full, so overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness, self-control just flows out of us effortlessly. We're not trying to produce it; it produces itself because we are in love with Him. You know, James says: *Draw near to him and He will draw near to you.* And okay, how do you do that? Our problem is we want it reduced to its -- okay, what six principles, and what sub principles, I want it 1A, B, C, D, I want it all laid out so I can figure it out how to do this, and then I'll do it and then that'll happen. But that's not how this works. You know, the means are the scripture, and the means are prayer, the means are fellowship, the means are using the things that God has given us to open the door to learn more and more about who Jesus is, what he has done. And of course the scripture is where we start and the scripture is endless. The deeper you get into it, the more you find that it's got greater depth and greater depth and greater depth and you'll never plumb the depths of it, but that's part of it. I can only point to examples where I see, and one of the best examples I've had, I've mentioned this one before. Years ago there was a documentary on PBS called "Religion in America," and what they wanted to do is they were basically, they were trying to be objective, they were trying to be outsiders and they were trying to look at what is this phenomenon of evangelicals and what is this

gospel stuff that these people believe in? And so they went down south and they were interviewing a woman who was the pianist at some little tiny little country church. And he wanted to know, he said, he wanted to know, what makes you tick, and what makes this so important to you? And she's sitting there -- this is years ago -- she had this great big bouffant hairdo, and she spoke like this, you know, and so it was easy to say, oh, you know, who's this person? And so she's starting to describe what takes place when she's playing the piano at worship. And she says, "And I just start thinking about Jesus and I start thinking about what he did," and the more she's talking about it, the more she's thinking, the more she's drawing on her experience with Christ, she just starts to cry. And I was watching that. And I turned to Janice and I said, "She gets it." She gets it. I wish I could say here's the program, here's what you do and at the end of that you'll come out of the program being able to cry because you'll understand the greatness and the love of Christ. I wish I could do that but I can't. I can just show you the tools. The tools are that God gives us but you have to want it and you have to want to learn more and more about who he is, how magnificent he is, what he has done in our lives so that you fall in love. And when you fall in love, it's a piece of cake. Living for the kingdom is incredibly easy when you're so passionately in love with the King. That's what we want to do and that's what we want to grow in. So let's pray for

that right now.

*Father, we want to be able to bear fruit and we want to be able to bear the fruit because we are abiding in you and we want to abide in you because we love you. Lord, we just pray that you would give us the ability through the means that you've given us through your church, through your word, through prayer, through all the different avenues that we have to grow our love for you. Lord, you have promised if we draw near to you, you will draw near to us and so I pray for each and every individual in this building, that we would sense God's Holy Spirit within us, that we would sense that draw and that pull and that we would use whatever means we can to draw near to you so that we can abide in you and sense your love and your wonder and your joy and with that love and with that passion be able to produce the fruit that we need to. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*