Session 10 Committed to Fruitfulness (Jn. 15:1-3)

I. REVIEW: THE CALL TO UNION WITH GOD

A. John 15 is a highpoint in the Scripture in terms of our relationship with God. Jesus’ main exhortation was to “abide in Me” (v. 5, 9c) so that we may bear fruit that remains forever (v. 16). Jesus is the vine, or source, and we are the branches, the expression. The result of this two-way conversation is the miracle of bearing fruit that remains; God recognizes and esteems it forever.

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me [talks to Me], and I in him [I talk to him], bears much fruit... 16 I chose you...that your fruit should remain..." (Jn. 15:5, 16)

I am continuing our series in John 15 on abiding in love. One of the most dynamic things that Jesus calls us to in our spiritual life is here in John 15. This is a high point of Scripture. It is the idea of being committed to our fruitfulness. Fruitfulness is the same as success. If you use the word “fruitfulness,” from God’s point of view, it is the same as being successful. Being successful in God’s point of view is not the same thing as being successful in man’s point of view. Those definitions are very far apart. Jesus is calling us to bear more fruit, to be more fruitful. He is telling us in this passage on abiding in Christ that our Father is committed to our fruitfulness, which means He is committed to our success. He wants us committed to our own fruitfulness. He wants us committed to the fruitfulness of the people we love and are invested in.

The problem is the fruitfulness comes in being pruned by the Father. That is one significant facet of increased fruitfulness. The Father pruning our life and us understanding and responding in the right way is an essential dimension to becoming more fruitful. One of the most misunderstood ministries of the Father to the church is the issue of pruning.

Pruning is entirely positive from God’s point of view. It is very different from discipline. He does not prune us regarding sin. He only prunes us when we are fruitful. He only prunes the faithful, obedient believer. The reason He prunes is to make us more successful.

He disciplines the compromising believer. He prunes the faithful believer. Often we get confused, and we think pruning is discipline. Or even more dramatic—we think pruning is the attack of the devil, and we rebuke it! How many of you know you cannot bind the Father in the name of Jesus?

The Father says, “I want you as committed to your fruitfulness as I am.” One way is by understanding the Father as the vinedresser and by responding to Him by trusting His leadership and being grateful for His intervention in our life. That is where we are going. That is basically the whole message summed up in one paragraph.

Let’s begin first with a review. In our last session we looked at the definition from John 15:5 of what it means to abide in Christ. Jesus is giving the call to abide in Christ. It is the high point of our relationship with God. It is talking about transforming union, our heart with God’s heart. Jesus is giving the most intimate call here in verse 5. He says, “Come abide in Me.” It does not end there. He says, “I am going to abide in you.” There is a two-fold abiding that we looked at in the last session. I will give the briefest review in this session.

In verse 5 He says, “I am the vine.” Meaning, “I am the source of the life.” He adds, “You are the branches. You are the expression of the supernatural life of God.” The supernatural life of God is different than physical life. He is not saying, “I am the Author of your physical life.” He is the Author. That is not His point here. He is saying, “I am going to release through you “zōé” life, the “God” kind of life. The life only God possesses.
Animals do not possess it. It is spiritual life. “I have called you and anointed you to impart that spiritual life,” which is a far different issue than having a dynamic personality or a gifted preaching or singing voice or being an entrepreneur. Those things do not impart supernatural life to people. Only the anointing of the Spirit does. He is talking about an impartation of life here.

He says, “I am the vine. I am the source. I have called you to be the branches, the expression of that life.” Then He says, “Here is how it works. You abide in Me.” That is one element. “I will abide in you.” That is an entirely different element. As I mentioned in our last session, Christ abiding in us is one of the most overlooked and neglected promises in the Bible, but it is a central theme here in John 15. I like to really make it simple—though this is not comprehensive—I use the words “talk to Me” interchangeably. When He says, “Abide in Me,” He is saying more than this, but He is saying, “Talk to Me. You talk to Me, and I will talk to you, and supernatural fruitfulness will be the result.”

He went on in verse 16—this is review still—He chose us as born-again believers to bear fruit that remains. The important part is that it is not fruit that remains just ten years. It is fruit that remains forever. He is talking about something happening in your heart and in your ministry whether your ministry is on the church org chart or your ministry is in the marketplace, whether your ministry is in the neighborhood or your ministry is in the home. He is talking about fruit in your life and fruit in your ministry that God remembers forever. By implication He is talking about eternal rewards here as well. He is saying, “You are going to do something together with Me that is going to last forever in My memory and in My esteem. I will remember it and esteem it forever.” That is a pretty dramatic promise. He is not talking about fruitfulness that remains a decade. He is not talking about building a church and ten years later the church is still there. He is talking about something far more dynamic than that.

B. This is a glorious reality for weak and broken people, that through the activity of the Spirit in us and through us we can do things or bear fruit that God esteems forever. Our life becomes epic as we diligently press into a lifelong journey, knowing that He sees, is moved by, and remembers all that we do in our quest to commune with Him in obedient love.

The glorious reality for weak and broken people like us is that the Holy Spirit does something in us and through us that lasts forever. Our life becomes epic when we know that He sees. Even if men and women do not see, if no one else sees and esteems, He sees and esteems what is happening. That is what makes our life powerful. We have to know that He sees. We have to believe it is important to Him.

C. **Bears fruit:** We bear fruit inwardly in our character and outwardly in our ministry and service to others—godly character (Gal. 5:22) and ministry and service (Jn. 4:36; Rom. 1:13; Phil. 1:22). Fruitfulness is about possessing love, humility, and purity, and then inspiring it in others.

He says, “You will bear fruit.” There are two dimensions of fruit bearing in the Bible. There is the inward character transformation. That is fruit. There is the external ministry and service to other people.

Bearing fruit is not only helping somebody, end of story. It is helping somebody, even in the slightest way. The Holy Spirit releases the anointing of the Spirit, the grace of God, when you help someone, when you give them the cup of cold water. Because of your relationship to the Lord, that small act of service moves their heart, even a little bit, to love, to humility, to purity. Because you touched their life in an ever-so-small way, they want to obey God more, even a little bit. This even touches an unbeliever. Now they are intrigued, “Tell me about why you are different.” Beloved, you are moving them forward in love even by that.
God’s definition of fruitfulness is His same definition of success, which is the same definition of being great in His sight. It is to grow in love, humility or purity. You could say it differently, but those are three big themes that are overlapping, but yet a little bit distinct.

When you grow in love, you are bearing fruit inside. When what I do—my words, my small deeds, helping somebody, giving them a cup of cold water—when it moves people forward because the grace of God is moving through me, through my words—talking to the person one-on-one on a phone call, greeting somebody in the neighborhood. God says, “I will use your words. I will move people forward in that progression in their own life. They will be more motivated to love. They will be more motivated to live in humility, to respond in it because you touch them.”

Fruitfulness is not just the act of service. It is service with the grace of God being manifest through your words, through your deeds, and through your kindness, even through your greetings and your countenance, your smile. We cannot measure it. Only He can measure it. The challenge is to shift our definition of success from what man calls success, which is basically if you get more influence and more applause and more people recognizing you, then you are more successful. You might be more successful when those things happen, but you are not more successful because those things happen. You are more successful if you are growing in love and humility and you are imparting love and humility, if you are inspiring people. That is the definition of success. Here in John 15 Jesus is saying, “I want to shift you over to that definition. Then when you have that definition, you will understand the pruning of My Father and how important it is in your life.” Because the pruning helps us make that shift.

D. **Abiding in Christ**: The main activity of a believer related to growing in God is to abide in Christ. It involves three things—talking with God, applying His promises, and obeying His leadership.

1. **Talking with Jesus**: The Christian life is an ongoing dialogue with a real Person. Talking with God is the core activity of abiding. This is where it starts, but it includes more.

2. **Applying His promises**: Applying the promises of God’s Word empowers us to bear fruit. Shame, fear, and rejection rise up to challenge what He says about loving, forgiving, healing, and providing for us, etc. We must apply the promise of the Word to our heart, by confessing the truth and resisting lies against it when we feel shame (Rom. 8:1).

3. **Obeying His leadership**: Jesus manifests His presence to those who obey (Jn. 14:21-23). Our spiritual capacity to feel and experience God’s love increases as we obey (Mt. 5:8). We do not earn God’s love or blessing by our obedience. We position ourselves to receive, express, and experience more grace by setting our hearts to walk in obedient love.

Last session I identified three different activities involved in abiding in Christ. There are two different themes—we abide in Him, and He abides in us. I identified three activities in each one of them. That was the last session. I do not want to spend a lot of time on this. Just for those who are with us for the first time. **To abide in Christ, number one, it involves talking with Him.** The core activity of abiding is these ten- and twenty-second sound bites of exchange, of conversation, throughout the day. That is the core activity of abiding in Him. Abiding starts there. It does not end there. There is more to abiding than that, but that is the core reality of abiding.

**Number two aspect of abiding in Christ. It is more than talking to Him. We have to apply His promises to our hearts.** What happens typically is that our natural thought processes and our natural emotions challenge what
God says is true about us. The Word of God says that Jesus has given us His righteousness. Our natural thought process is that we feel guilt, condemnation, rejected by God. The Lord says, “Speak My Word and reject those lying thoughts that challenge the truth about who you are.”

The Word says that the Lord loves us, that the Lord is involved in our lives. In our natural thought process and our natural emotions, we feel God is not paying attention to our circumstances, we feel like He does not care, and we feel like He ignores us. The Bible teaches us we are to challenge those lies, “It is written, ‘He loves us.’”

In John 15:9, Jesus said, “I love you in the intensity that My Father loves Me. When you do not feel it, do not just talk to Me through the day. That is the beginning. Apply My promises. Reject lying thoughts and emotions that are against the Word. Confess the truth, reject the lies.”

Some people are really big on talking to Jesus. That is amazing. They have developed that ongoing dialogue, but every negative emotion and every negative thought and lying thought that comes, they just accept it and say, “Well, Jesus, whatever You want.”

He says, “I do not want that. The truth is opposite. I want you to reject that.”

**Number three dimension of abiding in Christ is obeying His leadership.** There is no substitute for the spirit of obedience. I am talking about the setting of the heart to obey, not even the attaining of obedience. The setting of the heart to obey is a critical attitude that is essential to the “abiding in Christ” life. We looked at that in the last session. I am not going to develop that again.

E. **Christ abiding in us:** There are two aspects to the promise of Jesus abiding in us. First, He abides, or lives, in our spirit instantly at our new birth. Second, He abides in our hearts progressively as He manifests His presence in our hearts and renews our mind and emotions. We can have the fullness of God in our spirit, while our mind and emotions remain unrenewed.

Jesus said, “You abide in Me, but that is not the end of the story. I abide in you.” Beloved, this is glorious. This is one of the most glorious topics in the Bible. It is often neglected. He abides in us instantly at the new birth. The Word says that he who has joined himself to the Lord is one spirit with God. The day you are born again, God’s Spirit comes live in your spirit. You are fully and instantly unified with God in your spirit.

As a matter of fact, your spirit man has become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Your spirit is as righteous as God is because you possess His righteousness. Here is the difference. Your spirit can be in complete union with God, but your soul—your mind and emotions—can be really in the other direction. The challenge is not just for Him to abide in our spirit, which happens the moment we are born again. The challenge and the glory are to see Him abide, or manifest His presence, in our mind and emotions. That is what He is talking about mostly here. Not only, but mostly. He is saying, “You talk to Me, apply My promises, have a spirit of obedience, and you know what will happen? I will be formed in your heart. I will renew your mind and emotions. You will express Me in the way you think and feel. It is not that just your spirit will possess My Spirit. Your mind and emotions will reflect and express Me.” Of course that is the key to fruit bearing.

If you give somebody a cup of cold water, though there is not some great, powerful dynamic, there is that invisible dimension where that person is just a little bit stirred. They walk away and think, “Maybe God is real.” If they are a believer, they are thinking, “God loves me. That guy gave me a cup of cold water, and God loves me.” Beloved, that is fruit. Fruit is more than an act of service. It is an act of service that even slightly impacts the person in love or purity or humility to move them forward to obey God a little bit. It does not have to be a big, giant impartation. It moves them forward. That is bearing fruit.
The glorious thing is you can bear fruit even if you can have no education, no gifting anybody can recognize, no ministry that anybody pays attention to, no friends, no money. You can still bear fruit if you lock into this reality. You can be the last person picked every time at class all your years. The Lord says, “I picked you first. They may have picked you last. You can bear fruit forever if you will engage in this process.”

F. Paul spoke of Jesus “dwell ing in our hearts,” or abiding in us by His manifest presence (Eph. 3:17), and of Christ being formed in our hearts (Gal. 4:19).

16…that He would grant you…to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith… (Eph. 3:16–17)

II. GOD’S FRUITFUL VINEYARD (JN. 15:1-5)

A. Jesus exhorted the redeemed to abide in Christ as the way to bear fruit (Jn. 15:5). He began by emphasizing two important truths necessary to cultivate an abiding life that bears fruit (Jn. 15:1). First, that Jesus is the true vine; and second, that the Father is the vinedresser.

1“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser… 2Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit… 5He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit…” (Jn. 15:1-5)

Now we are going to look at new material. I took a lot of time on the review, but I love the review. I said it all for me. We are moving forward, but the key issue that I am going to highlight is this: the key to greater fruitfulness is the Father pruning us, but it does not stop there. We must understand the pruning process and actually respond rightly. That is the key. We will not respond rightly if we do not know that the Father does it and why He does it. If we are confused, we will respond wrongly, and we will retreat from the Lord instead of developing the dialogue called abiding in Him. We will stop the conversation instead of enhancing the conversation if we do not understand abiding and pruning and the reason why God prunes us. He has nothing but good motives. He is fighting for our success, our fruitfulness, and our greatness.

“I am the true vine. My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes,” (John 15:1). He prunes it so that the person, the individual believer—the branch is the individual believer—He prunes it so they can become more successful in His sight. He prunes it; they bear more fruit. He prunes it that they grow in love and they have an ability to inspire others to love. That is what fruit is. They grow in humility, and their words and interactions with people help people grow in humility and purity.

There are a lot of folks in the body of Christ who, when they interact with someone, the result is that the person becomes more impure than pure. That interaction of that guy or that gal actually creates impurity and pride. I say, “Lord, I want to be a vessel that when I interact with people, they become a little bit more motivated to be pure, to be humble, to understand love and give themselves to it.” You cannot do that just through clever words, a personality, or gifting in music. It is not about leadership abilities. That is an anointing of the Spirit. It is for anybody who wants to walk in it. You may never have a ministry that anybody notices, but the Father will see that in you.

“I am the vine. My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that bears fruit”—this is a faithful, obedient believer (John 15:1-2). The Father responds to an obedient believer by pruning them to make them more successful, to make them more fruitful—He is committed to our fruitfulness—to make them grow. “He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit” (John 15:5). He ties the subject of the Father pruning us to us abiding in Christ. The two subjects go together. If we misinterpret the pruning of the Father or we do not
understand it, we will actually stop abiding. We will get preoccupied with things that are happening in our life, with a sense of failure, we will feel abandoned by God, and we actually will quit talking to Him because we misunderstand being pruned. Pruning is supposed to enhance the abiding, not diminish the abiding.

Notice in verse 1 Jesus introduces the subject of abiding with two very important truths. These two truths are not incidental or accidental. He says, “I am going to teach you about the abiding truth. There are fundamental truth one and fundamental truth two. You get these truths and you will be equipped to grow in the abiding life.” Truth one, “I am the vine.” Truth two, “My Father is the vinedresser.” Let’s look at each one.

B. **True vine:** Jesus as the vine is the source and model of how to relate to God and bear fruit. Jesus is like the sap in the vine; He is the source of divine life and leadership for our life.

1. **Model:** Jesus is the model of how a believer is to relate to God. In John 14, Jesus described how He related to the Father in His humanity, by abiding in Him (Jn. 14:10-11, 20). In John 15, Jesus called us to relate to Him in the way He related to the Father.

2. **The vine:** Jesus is “the” true vine—the only source of life that satisfies the human heart and empowers us to bear fruit. The vine that satisfies our heart is not wealth, favor, fame, prominence, friendships, or entertainment, etc. Some believers only see Jesus as savior, healer, or provider, but do not yet know Him as the vine from which they draw life.

When Jesus says, “I am the vine,” He is saying, “I am the source of your growth.” More than that, He is saying, “I am actually your model.” Because, if you are reading John 15 in context, of course you are going to have just read John 14.

In John 14, Jesus explains how He is our model. If you are new to John 14, just be excited by this description. This is an exciting thing that happens. In John 14, Jesus described how He related to His Father in His humanity. We know Jesus is fully God and fully Man. How Jesus relates to the Father as God—that is above our pay scale, right? The Father is the uncreated God. The Son is the uncreated God. The Spirit. One God in three persons, the mystery of the trinity, the Godhead.

Jesus says in John 14, “I am going to show you how I relate to My Father in My humanity.” In John 14, which is another subject we will look at in the weeks to come, Jesus described how as a Man He was abiding in the Father. He says that in John 14, and then in John 15 He says, “Now I want you to relate to Me in the way that I relate to My Father.” The way to understand abiding in Christ in chapter 15 is by understanding Jesus abiding in the Father in chapter 14. That is why the two chapters have to go together. That is another subject for one of our other sessions. That is an exciting one. I taught on this about a year ago on a Friday night. I love that subject so much that I just wanted to do it three weeks in a row. How Jesus abides in the Father. That is a model of how we abide in Him. That is another subject for another time.

He is not only the model; He is the source. He says, “I am the vine. I am the source. I am the sap in the vine. You talk to Me, and the grace of God, the anointing of God, the presence of God”—I am using those synonymously—“the Holy Spirit’s presence will touch you, and it will flow through you. You talk to Me more, and you will experience more.”

Understand, you will not be more saved if you talk to Him more. You will not be more forgiven. You are 100 percent saved and 100 percent forgiven the moment you are born again. You are not going to gain any more salvation or forgiveness by talking to Him, but you will experience a lot more in this age. Your mind and
emotions will be impacted more by His presence if you talk to Him more. You do not earn it. You just put yourself in the position for that to touch your mind and your emotions.

He says, “I am the vine.” I like that definite article, “I am the vine. There is no other. I am the vine that satisfies the heart. I am the vine that empowers this fruitfulness. I am the vine. You talk to Me, then you give somebody a cup of cold water, and My Spirit will touch them even a little bit in your exchanges with people.” Your service will not be service end-of-story; it will be service with a spiritual impact. You cannot measure it.

I cannot think of any greater way of service than a mother in her home. The reason I say that, as I mentioned earlier, I believe the number one disciple-makers in the history of the body of Christ are mothers in their homes discipling children. Those children grow up and love Jesus. The mothers are discipling. Here is what I want to say to moms. Some moms get so locked into "being a mom", to mothering, that they neglect their own relationship with the Lord because they are so devoted to be all-present to their child. Let me tell you, a radically dedicated mom who does not have the Spirit being imparted through her is not going to end up with children who are moved spiritually by her mothering. We need to be spiritual people even if we are focused on our home. We still need the vine, to interact with Him.

I have seen some mothers so devoted to their children. I say, “You are so filled with fear and anxiety, and you have no peace. That is what you are imparting to your little peewees, even though you love them. Talk to Jesus. Connect with Him a little bit. You cannot impart Jesus without your devotion. You impart Him by encountering Him. I mean a little bit, just a little bit as the days and years go by.”

It is the same thing with fathering, the same thing with preaching, the same thing with singing, the same thing with working in the marketplace, and an entrepreneurial gift. A winsome, powerful personality cannot release the spiritual power to move somebody. It takes the anointing. We do not earn the anointing. I am talking about this invisible dimension where people are strangely moved, even a little bit, by interacting with you. That is what fruit bearing is.

Jesus is the source. Our natural way of thinking—I am not picking on anybody. It is my natural way of thinking, too—Our natural way is to think that the vine is increase. If we get wealth or favor or have friends or prominence, if better things happen, we think our life will be happier. Jesus says, “I promise you those things are not the vine. I am. They are not the vine. They will make your circumstance easier, but they will not move your heart.”

“I know, I know,” we say. Then we invest all our life in getting more money, more networking, more gifting, more skill—which it is important to do that actually. But, beloved, when we get those things, know this: they are not the vine. They will not satisfy you nor will they empower you to impart spiritual life. They may give you a big audience with a king. If you have billions of dollars, the king may listen to you, but you will not impart spiritual life just because you have a lot of money. It is because you talk to Him, you have encountered Him, and you abide in Him.

Some believers only see Jesus as Savior. They know about His forgiveness. Some see Him as healer. Some know Him as provider. They have seen Him heal. They have been forgiven, they have been healed, they have been provided for, they have even seen financial miracles, but they do not know Jesus as the vine yet. They do not know Jesus as the one they interact with in a deep and regular way. They do not know the vine. They know the Savior, the healer, and the provider. Jesus is beckoning His disciples here, “I want you to know Me as the vine, not just as the one who forgives you for your sins.”
C. **Vinedresser:** We must see the Father as a zealous vinedresser, or chief gardener, who oversees the health and fruitfulness of His vineyard. He takes the initiative to intervene to train, provide, heal, protect, and direct every fruitful believer to bring them to greater fruitfulness.

1 “...My Father is the vinedresser...” 2 Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” (Jn. 15:1-3)

The revelation of the Father as the vinedresser, the gardener, is equally important. Jesus said, “My Father is the vinedresser, and He is going to prune every branch that is successful, that is going forward spiritually. He is going to remove some things.” When they go forward spiritually, here is what happens. When a vine bears fruit, by the very process of bearing fruit, a lot more things grow up that are the result of bearing fruit. A fruitful vine has a lot of branches that have to be removed. You have that increase fruitfulness in your life, and inevitably other things—good things, not necessarily bad things. I do not mean sinful things—other things will happen in your life. The Father says, “I am going to move them out of the way.”

If you cannot make the distinction between what is true growing in love and humility with things growing up around you, when He move some things so that you bear more fruit, you might think, “God what did I do? Why are You mad at me?”

He says, “I am just moving things so you can bear more fruit.”

After every season in the vineyard, eighty to ninety percent of the branches that grew during the fruitful season have to be trimmed back the next spring or there will not be another harvest. The Father says, “You do not have enough insight, you do not have enough resolve to move them yourself.”

I do not. You do not. I do not see what they are, and if I did I would say, “Yeah, Lord, but they are so good. They are the fruit of your blessing. I mean, come on! They came with the increase of Your favor and fruit.”

The Lord says, “Now they are getting in the way. Because the point is that you grow in love, humility, and purity. It is not that you just get more famous. You get more holy, more humble, not more famous.”

“Yeah, but I thought that favor was that I was supposed to get more famous and get more resource.”

The Lord says, “I have reasons for seasons of increase, of favor and influence and money, but that is not the big point. The big point is to grow in love, purity, and humility. That is what I am fighting for.”

Because no matter how much money you have and how big your audience is, your influence is not going to make it to the judgment seat, only how big your heart is. When Billy Graham stands before the Lord, the Lord is not going to say, “You filled up how many stadiums?” He is not going to ask him how big his stadiums were. He is going to ask him how big his heart response was to love, humility, and purity. That is all that the Lord is going to ask Billy Graham about—those kinds of things.

I say, “Lord, I know this. I have been saying this for a while. Still in the crunch of everyday life, I do not know that I have the insight, nor the resolve to move some things out of the way.”

The Father says, “I am more committed to your greatness than you are. I will move them because I love you. If you get hurt and offended when I move them, you will not abide, you will not keep the conversation going.” That is what verse 4 is about. We are in verse 2 right now.

He says, “You have to understand what I am doing.” Because what we want is more influence, more resources, more favor, more friends, and what He wants is more love and more humility. He likes giving us favor,
influence, and friends, but that is not the point. That is a secondary thing. The secondary thing so quickly becomes the primary thing. We all know better, but we still spend so much of our time getting more influence, more resources, and more favor, and our abiding life gets weaker and weaker and weaker.

The Lord says, “I love you too much to let that continue. You are fruitful; you are faithful. I am going to remove some things, some branches you do not have the insight to remove. Trust Me. I am on your team. I am more committed to your success than you are. I just want you to have success that lasts forever.”

In verse 3, Jesus says, “You are already clean.” This is a really essential point Jesus is making. What happens is we easily confuse being pruned with being disciplined. The Father does not prune compromise. He prunes growth. He prunes obedience. Not the obedience itself, but the fruit of the life, the fruit of the obedience. He prunes the increase of the growth. He disciplines sin. He prunes increase. Again, it is the branches that go along with the flow of life increasing in our life.

People get all confused, “Are You mad at me? God, are You ignoring me? Some of the branches have been removed. Some of the stuff is gone. What have I done wrong? In the name of Jesus, I rebuke you devil” or “I am repenting. O, forgive me.”

The Lord says, “What are you doing? It is not the devil. You do not repent for that. Say, ‘Thank You, Father. You love me so much.’” He says, “You are clean. This is not about disobedience. You are already clean. Do not repent. Receive My leadership and trust.”

D. **More fruit**: The Father’s plan is that we bear fruit that remains forever, fruit that He rewards. Jesus spoke of “more fruit” (v. 2), “much fruit” (v. 5, 8), and “fruit that remains” (v. 16). Greater fruitfulness does not guarantee that we will have more financial resources or influence, etc.

E. The Father is committed to our fruitfulness and wants us committed to it by trusting His leadership even when He prunes us. He wants us to be committed to the fruitfulness of others by helping them to trust His leadership when He prunes them.

28 *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God…* (Rom. 8:28)

The gardener cuts the branches off. He removes branches. Those were removed so the vine is more flush with life. Those are branches that are the fruit of a season of dynamic growth. They are not weeds. They are not thorns and thistles. They are branches that are the fruit of a season of dynamic growth in life.

F. **Pruning**: A gardener cuts branches off the vine so it will be more flush with life. Each year after the harvest, in early spring, the vinedresser prunes (cuts away) over 80% of the vine from the previous year’s growth. If it is not cut off, the vine will grow as a wild vine without producing many grapes. The pruned branches are those resulting from the good life in the vine.

Practically speaking, I do not know all the details of pruning because the Lord does not break them all down here. Sometimes it is removing some of the increased activities that come alongside a season of growth. The growth comes, and there are more demands on our lives, more responsibilities, people have greater expectations of you and me. We have greater expectations of them. Activities, attitudes, and mindsets, not necessarily negative ones. They are just presuppositions that get set up in our thinking.

The Lord says, “I am going to remove some of those things. They are in the way now of you talking to Me like you used to before the growth spurt happened. Before the growth spurt happened, we were connecting. Then
because we were connecting, you went through a spurt of growth of fruitfulness. The branches grew with it. Now I am going to remove them out of the way because now they are hindering our connection.”

G. Practically, the pruned branches speak of removing some of the increased activities, demands, responsibilities, and expectations that came with increased fruitfulness in the previous season. It may result in a decrease of money, ministry, influence, popularity, position, or power, etc. No one knows exactly how it works every time. The Father is the only one with the wisdom to do it. It may result in a decrease of money, or it may be a decrease of your ministry whether in the church or the marketplace. Maybe your influence goes down. Maybe your popularity goes down. “They do not like me like they used to.”

The Lord says, “That is good. You do not like Me like you used to, and we need to correct that before we meet face to face. You really want to correct that before we meet face to face because I love you so much. When you see the intensity of how I love you, you will want to have loved Me more.”

This is not about punishment here at all. People, particularly people young in ministry, whether ministry in the church, the marketplace, in government or education, have this idea that their life over fifty years is one kind of ascending growth of upward mobility. If their influence on a scale of one to ten is a three, then a decade later they will influence a four, then they will influence five. It is nothing but upwardly mobile increase. That is a western paradigm, not a kingdom paradigm at all.

You may have an influence of three, and in total obedience, in the next season have an influence of two. You may grow from three to two. You may grow to four, and you may grow back to two again. I have talked to people about IHOPKC over the years. Because the Lord gave us this word about when we get 500 we will grow to 5000. I have said this over the years, “We may grow from 500 and grow to 300 before we grow to 5000. We may grow to 5000 and then grow back to 300.”

None of that even matters with what God is going to tell me when I talk to Him. He is not going to say, “How many did you grow to?” He will say, “How did you and Me do? Did you abide in Me in the pruning seasons? Did you abide in Me in the fruitful seasons? Was the fruitfulness enhancing your abiding, and did the pruning enhance your abiding? Did you get preoccupied?” To some He might say today, “When things are smaller, you are so offended, you have a rejection spirit. You are so worried. You are so preoccupied. We do not talk anymore like we used to.”

H. In our circumstances, pruning sometime looks like a decrease of God’s blessing in our lives; thus some totally misinterpret it and feel discouraged, instead of thanking God and trusting His leadership, knowing that they will be more fruitful in love. Too much activity diminishes our life of abiding in Christ. Blessing in one season can create added distraction in the next season.

I. Pruning results in us possessing more love, humility, and purity in our life and imparting it in our ministry. He cuts off the branches that cause the life-flow in us to be distracted or diminished. By pruning us, the Lord is removing the distraction that was produced from a season of fruitfulness just previously. The point of pruning is that we would possess more love and humility and that we would inspire and impart more love and humility. We would possess it, and we would impart it.

Jesus said, “Let Me tell you about My Father. I know My Father well. Every branch will be pruned. Every branch.” Beloved, that is a glorious promise, not a dreadful warning.” Honestly.

People look at that and think, “What?”
Jesus said, “I know My Father is so zealous for you. He will prune you if you are fruitful. If you are not fruitful, and there is compromise, He will discipline you because He wants to wake you up.”

This pruning is to shift our definition of success from man’s definition of success to God’s. God’s definition of success is growth in love, humility, and purity. That is His definition of success. Man’s definition of success is growth in the applause of man, influence and resources. That is a good definition of success, but it needs to be the secondary definition though, not the first. I want to grow in money. I want to grow in influence. I want more friends. I want more everything. If that becomes number one, it becomes a problem. I love it when God gives me economic increase, when the Lord blesses IHOP KC or my personal life. I say, “Yes.” Yes, I love it. I love it.

The Lord is saying, “This is not the big thing about you. This is secondary.” I love it when we influence more people, but beloved, a crowd of people is not the same thing as moving the crowd to humility and purity. I do not just want a crowd.

We are on pace to have 25,000 register for our conference next month. Some of my friends have said, “Wow, the Lord has really increased in your ministry.”

I said, “How do you know?”

They said, “Well, 25,000 young people.”

I said, “Yeah, but my ministry only increases to the number that are motivated to purity when they leave. How do you know my ministry is increasing? It does not matter how many jam in, how high they jump, and how high they scream. Do they walk in purity the next week because they came to our conference? If they do not, my ministry did not increase.” The crowd did, my popularity did, but not my ministry. Not my fruit.

Really, I do not get that technical any time somebody is giving me an encouragement. The guy would say, “Hey, note to self, do not ever encourage that guy again.” I do not really do that, but I think it. If those young people are not more pure after they hear me talk, my ministry did not increase. I do not know if they are. I will only know at the judgment seat, when it is all said and done.

J. **Every branch**: The Father wants every fruit-bearing believer to bear more fruit. His commitment to prune us is a glorious promise, not a dreadful warning. He intervenes to bring forth more love, and purity in our life and ministry. The Lord is more committed to our greatness in His grace than we are (Mt. 5:19).

K. The Father needs to prune us because we do not have the resolve or wisdom to cut off the familiar and seemingly good activities in our lives that result from seasons of fruitfulness.

III. **THE FATHER’S PRUNING IS NOT DIVINE DISCIPLINE**

A. The purpose of the Father’s *pruning* is to remove *distraction* from an obedient believer, whereas the purpose of the Father’s *discipline* is to remove *sin* from a compromising believer. They are very different. He does not prune sin, but distractions that hinder our growth in love.

1. “...let us lay aside every weight [distractions], and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” (Heb. 12:1)

B. **You are already clean**: We are lovely to God even in our weakness, because of Jesus’ blood.
2...every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. (Jn. 15:2–3)

After talking about pruning, in the very next phrase, Jesus says, “You are clean. Pruning you is not about rebuking you. This is not about you repenting. That is not what we are talking about here. You are already clean. This is not about cleaning you up. This about you going deeper with Me, not about cleaning you up.”

IV. FOUR SOURCES OF PRESSURE
Someone might say, “This whole subject of pressure or decrease is confusing.” How does it work when decrease comes, because pruning is removing things that are not intrinsically bad, but come from the season of fruitfulness? They are not weeds and thorns, and it is not snakes. It is the branch that grew from the fruitfulness. I see four sources of pressure or decrease in our lives.

A. The Father’s zeal: He prunes and disciplines to remove that which hinders love in us (Heb. 12:5-12). We must submit to His leadership.

One source of pressure—but all four overlap sometimes—the Father’s zeal for your good. The Father loves you so much. He says, “I will prune you if you are fruitful, I will discipline you if you are compromising. I love you so much.” What do we do with the Father’s zeal? We submit to His leadership. Yet the story of pressure does not end there.

B. Satan’s attacks: He seeks to devour us. We must actively resist him. He has no “ceasefire” in his attack against us. It is permitted within the limitations that God sets, yet we must resist him.

Sometimes it is the devil attacking us to devour us. The Bible makes it clear in many places. Resist him. Do not thank God for the devil. Resist the devil in the name of Jesus. Some people say, “Well, I just thank God for whatever happens in my life.”

I say, “What are you thanking God for? You have been given the authority of Jesus to trample on scorpions, and you have authority over the powers of the devil. Why are you thanking God that the devil is hitting you? Take authority!”

“Oh, oh.”

C. Man’s sin and weakness: In our sin and weakness, we can make decisions that can lead to a decrease in the blessing that the Lord made available to us. We are to repent of wrong decisions.

Some of the decrease or pressure in our life is because of our own weakness and sin. Weakness is not exactly the same thing as sin. We make decisions that create pressure. Some decisions are sinful; some are just wrong. Meaning they are not intrinsically sinful. What do we do about our wrong decisions? We repent of them.

D. Creation groans: We see creation’s groan in earthquakes, violent weather patterns, etc., (Rom. 8:22-23). When Adam sinned, a curse came on the land (Gen. 3). His work was cursed by toil and frustration. We work hard to restore what is lacking or destroyed. There is a connection between our actions and the condition of the creation (land, vegetation, weather patterns, etc.).

17Cursed is the ground...in toil you shall eat of it...18Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you [frustration]...19In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread... (Gen. 3:17-19)
There is a fourth dimension of pressure. I call it creation’s groan. In Romans 8 Paul said, “All creation groans.” What happens? We find it in Genesis 3. When Adam sinned, it says the ground was cursed with thorns and thistles, and sweat. Meaning, because of sin in the created order, Adam’s work—by the way work was a blessing before there was sin. Work is not the fruit of Adam’s sin—Frustration on our work is the fruit of Adam’s sin. Not the work. In the resurrection we will still work, but there will be no frustration. There will be no thorns, no thistles.

That is where the frustration is. We are working hard, the sun is bearing down on us, the thorns are sticking at us, we are hot, and we are hungry and we think, “Oh, Adam why did you do this?” There is frustration. There is labor. We are hungry; we are hot. The thorns and the thistles are growing, and they are frustrating our work.

What we do with creation’s groan is we work with diligence, we listen to the Lord, and we are faithful in small things in the toil of the frustration without quitting.

To the Father’s zeal for our good, we submit to His leadership. Satan we resist. Sin and weakness, we repent. Creation’s groan, we are faithful in smallness, in the place of frustration and little because we know the Lord sees it all and it matters.

V. WESTERN PARADIGM AND PRUNING

A. In our Western mindset, we often see “bigger as better;” to have more money, influence, honor, friends, and comfort is usually seen as being successful without regard for the quality of one’s relationship with God. Sometimes more of a “good thing” hinders us from abiding in Christ.

You know where this is going. In our western mindset, we often see bigger as better. Bigger is more successful to us. Even if the man does not grow in God, he is still successful if his stuff is bigger. That is not biblical. If a man has influence, and his ministry is growing, but his heart is not growing, the man is not on a path of success. I am talking about someone in regards to ministry. It could be the man in ministry in the marketplace. His business can explode, the presidents of nations are inviting him in, but his heart is not increasing. He is not on a pathway of success from God’s point of view.

B. A believer can be popular in ministry—in the Church or marketplace—without being spiritually fruitful. Being wealthy and influential is not synonymous with being faithful and fruitful.

A believer can be popular in ministry, but not fruitful. We have a lot of worship teams and preachers and people writing books. You may sell a million copies of your book or a million CD’s of your worship songs. You might be popular. It does not mean you are fruitful. It does not mean the people who read your book and hear your music are moving forward in God. It means that when you sing or you write, they cry because your stuff is moving and cool, and your music makes them jump and scream. It does not mean they are motivated for purity. Though I like increase, I do not confuse increase with fruitfulness. I do not mix them up. They are not synonymous. Being popular and being fruitful are not the same.

C. Someone who only influences a few people to grow in love is fruitful from God’s point of view. I want to be faithful and fruitful much more than I want to be rich and influential without fruit.

D. Our highest life goal and primary dream is to be faithful and fruitful. I am grateful when the Lord gives me increase in finances, influence, and other things, but I do not mix that up with being faithful and fruitful in love, humility, and purity.
VI. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

If we do not see the revelation of the Father as the vinedresser, if we do not see the revelation of who He is as the vinedresser, we will not rejoice in His leadership. We will not be at peace with the pruning. When the pruning comes, we will be so upset with the pruning. We will think that God has forsaken us.

A. Believers who do not see the Father as “the vinedresser” see all decrease in their circumstances as being only negative. They cannot see any redemptive purpose in the decrease. Without the revelation of the Father as the vinedresser, we are more tempted to be offended with His leadership, instead of being grateful for His loving hand pruning us.

B. Such believers are prone to assume God is ignoring, punishing, or disciplining them for past failure or that the devil is attacking them when circumstances are small. They see all decrease as bad and from the devil or as a result of wrong or sinful decisions. With this wrong perspective, they feel discouraged and ashamed, instead of trusting God’s leadership in their life.

If we do not understand His pruning, we will think He is ignoring us, He is punishing us, He is disciplining us, or the devil is attacking us. We feel discouraged, we are ashamed, we are introspective, and we are not talking at all to Him. He is saying, “What are you doing? Do you not see My Son told you I would do this to every fruitful believer? Why is this so unusual to you?”

C. Many are so rooted in a Western paradigm that they live perpetually in discouragement about their ministry in the church or marketplace, because it is small and difficult (Mt. 25:23); thus, they are often in “transition” to a new ministry assignment.

This is an important point. We are so rooted in a western paradigm, not a kingdom paradigm, that when our life or our assignment is small and difficult, we are unhappy with it. The truth is, most people’s assignment is small and difficult. Jesus said on the last day in Matthew 25, “Well done good and faithful one, because it was small, and it was hard, but you stayed faithful” (Matthew 25: 21,23, paraphrased).

But because of creation’s groan, this frustration comes. Here is one thing I hear, and I am not against this because I know half the room would say this. I am talking to half of that half of the room. I have been in ministry for X amount of years. The number one thing I hear, probably 100 times a day—which is massively exaggerated—I hear the sentence, “I am in transition.” I hear, “I am in transition,” more times than, “Jesus, I love you” or “I do not like that worship leader.” I hear, “I am in transition” more than any one sentence in my life. “I am in transition.”

Many people are truly in transition. But for many other people, what has happened is they have run into difficulty, and they do not like it. So now they are in transition. The Father says, “I am not the one who has you in transition. You do not like My leadership in your life right now. You are in transition because you are saying no to Me in a time of pruning. Creation’s groan, the sweat and the toil—you do not like small and hard things. That is what I have assigned you to in this season.”

“I am in transition.” Some of you really are. Some of you are just misinterpreting the glory of the Father as the vinedresser.
D. The truth of “the vinedresser” is essential to cultivating a life of abiding in Christ. If we do not see the Father as the vinedresser who prunes us to remove that which hinders love in us, then we will not trust His leadership. We will often be too discouraged, or in a frenzy to fix the smallness in our ministry, that we cannot maintain the dialogue with the Lord that is essential to abiding in Christ (v. 4). When we see the redemptive goodness of the Father’s commitment to prune us (v. 2), we feel clean instead of rejected (v. 3), and then we can abide in Him (v. 4). Confidence in the process and in the Father’s leadership leading to fruitfulness is essential in this.

Catch the logic of the passage. He starts off in verse 1. He says, “I am the vine. My Father is the vinedresser.” The two big doctrines, the two big truths. He says, “My Father is going to prune you if you do well in the spirit, but you are clean, so do not get all discouraged, and do not get in a funk.” When He prunes you, and things get smaller, do not get in a frenzy to get big again. Stay steady. Trust His leadership.

In verse 4 He says, “Abide in Me. Now talk to Me.” We will never, ever get to verse 4, “Talk to Me,” if we do not respond rightly to the vinedresser, understanding the revelation of the Father as the vinedresser. If we do not respond to His pruning rightly, we will stop talking to Him. He introduces abiding with this revelation because this is what shuts down abiding in people’s lives. They get offended, they get discouraged, and they get so introspective. They are fixated on growth, fixated on fixing it, trying to get an audience, trying to get influence. The Lord says, “You have so much influence with Me. Why don’t we talk more?” Amen and amen.