

Abiding in Christ (Part 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 January 2022

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] John chapter 15, verses 1-11, if you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! 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.

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

[1 : 22] Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? I was a terrible student in middle school, high school, and in college.

Once I realized that I could pass a class with a D, that changed my entire perspective on school. If I paid just enough attention in class, if I turned in just enough of my homework assignments, if I crammed just enough before a test, I'd pass the class.

And then I could use that extra time not studying and not doing homework to do whatever I wanted to, and so I thought I was smart for being so dumb.

However, my parents did not share my same attitude towards learning. I did a pretty good job during the semester of hiding my grades from them, but there was no stopping the report card that would get mailed to my house.

[2 : 48] And that was always a really bad day for me, especially when the report card got into my father's hands. On one such occasion, I remember being at our kitchen table.

On one end in front of me was my father. I was on the other end, and on the side was my middle sister. And she, like my oldest sister, were straight-A students, so they were always excited whenever report card day came.

My dad had my report card in his hands, and he had a pen in the other hand. And he asked me to explain why my grades were so bad.

And I responded by letting him know that, well, dad, D is passing. And he looked at me, and he took the pen that was in his hand, and he threw it across the table, and it hit me in the chest.

My dad is a pretty calm man, and whenever he is angry, it is terrifying. And I froze as he rose from the table. He looked bigger and more angrier than I had ever seen him in my life.

[4 : 12] Yet he said to me, Michael, see where that attitude gets you in life. And then he turned around and went down the stairs.

I remember looking at my sister, and we just froze like, oh, my gosh. What did you just do? To this day, I still remember that moment very vividly in my mind.

And I always will, and I get a little emotional talking about it because it's a turning point in my life.

Seeing how deeply I had disappointed my father troubled me, and I wish I could say that I turned it around right away.

I didn't. It took time. But I knew that I had it in me to do better, and I knew that I could be more productive of a student. And I also knew that my father loved me. And in love, he told me what I needed to hear. I didn't need to be coddled. I didn't need to be—what I needed to be, excuse me, was disciplined.

[5 : 17] I needed that pen to be thrown at my direction. What my dad said was true. And the truth hurts sometimes, but only those who truly love you are willing to tell you what you truly need to hear instead of what you want to hear.

I had an attitude towards life that was reflected in my grades. It was an unproductive, unfruitful attitude that needed to be severed. And so, what I learned, and what I know many of the rest of you have learned, is that good parents, loving mothers and fathers, discipline their children, and they do it for their good.

And they use discipline to mold and to shape their child into the person that they should become or they hope that they will become. And so, we're in John chapter 15, and chapters 13 through 17 in John capture Jesus' last moments with his disciples before he is arrested and then crucified. And they are some of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture because here we see Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is soon to come, his imminent crucifixion.

And then also what is to happen afterward, his subsequent resurrection and then his ascension to heaven. And so, Jesus here is preparing his disciples not just for what will soon take place, but for what will take place after his resurrection, which is the coming of the Holy Spirit, who he will tell them, will indwell them, and then use them to advance the gospel.

[6 : 54] Here in John chapter 15, as we saw last week, Jesus uses an analogy of a vine and its branches to communicate an important spiritual truth to his disciples.

At this point, if you recall, Jesus has left the upper room with his disciples. He's continuing to teach them as they are walking to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Just moments before this happened, Jesus revealed to the twelve disciples that one of them was an imposter, that one of them would betray him.

And we know that that person was Judas. But the shock of the disciples was still fresh in their mind as they were going, I believe, realizing that one of them, who they thought they could trust, was a traitor.

And so, in his illustration, Jesus portrays himself as the vine. He uses Old Testament imagery of Israel to communicate a New Testament reality, that in him and only in him is their spiritual life, is their spiritual nourishment, is their spiritual growth.

[8 : 00] And then Jesus says that there are two kinds of branches that are in him. Ones that do not bear fruit and ones that do. God is pictured as the vine dresser.

He is the one who inspects the branches. He's the one who prunes the ones that bear fruit so that they will bear more fruit and cuts away the ones that do not bear fruit at all, which are then gathered and are destroyed.

Last week's sermon focused primarily on the unfruitful branches who, like Judas, appear to be in Christ but are not truly. That sermon focused on the two tasks of the vine dresser, which was, one, judgment.

So, last week we looked at the vine dresser's task of judgment. And here this week we will focus on the other action of the vine dresser, which is the act of pruning. Pruning the branches that are truly in the vine.

And so, the main idea for this morning's message is this. Every branch that is truly in Christ will be pruned. And it will be pruned so that it will bear more fruit.

[9 : 10] Every branch that is truly in Christ will be pruned so that it will bear more fruit. Well, what does that mean to be pruned? How does pruning result in more fruit bearing?

How does cutting and wounding the branch produce good things? Well, two principles emerge from these verses that I did not cover last week. And they are principles that are incredibly profound and spiritually profitable.

Jesus, the master teacher, uses this illustration of the vine and its branches to explain the Christian life in ways that reminded me, as I studied it this week, of how great it is to truly be in Christ.

And how wonderful it is to know the Father who disciplines those whom He loves. And so, I pray that this message will produce within you a worshipful spirit and attitude as you come to understand these true principles and what they mean for the Christian life.

And the first principle is this. A fruitful branch will be pierced by the vine dresser's pruning knife. A fruitful branch will be pierced by the vine dresser's pruning knife.

[10:25] Look again with me at verses 1 through 2. Jesus says, I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser. 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. There are two things, as already mentioned, that the Father does in tending the vine and its branches.

As we saw last week again, one of those things He does is He takes away fruitless branches.

People who, like Judas, outwardly appear united to Christ, but who never truly trusted in Him and never truly were united to Him.

People who, like Judas, associate themselves with Jesus for material gain and prosperity, but depart from Him the moment persecution comes, who retreat when the cost of discipleship becomes apparent to them.

They are like the seed that fell in the shallow soil. Their faith withers and dies from the heat of the sun because it was shallow and it was superficial.

[11:33] It wasn't genuine. They are only in it for themselves. The other thing that the Father does, according to this illustration, is that He prunes fruitful branches.

So, again, there are two actions that the Father, the vine dresser, takes in regard to the branches. He cuts away the lifeless and He cultivates the living.

He destroys and He disciplines. Again, last week we looked at that first action, but now let's turn our focus to the second one, the vine dressers pruning the fruitful branches, the branch that is truly and permanently united to the vine which will be pruned.

Now, for most of us in our culture, gardening is a hobby. But in the first century, growing produce was how many people earned their living.

It was how they literally put food on the table for their families. And so a lot of time and care was spent to ensure that whatever they planted produced as well as it could.

[12:39] And that meant a lot of pruning. And pruning required a lot of patience. Pruning took place in two stages. First, there was the initial pruning, which took place in the spring when the vines were in the flowering stage.

Before they had any fruit on them, the vine dresser would prune the branch by shaping it, by giving it the correct shape so that it could produce and support quality fruit in the future.

If the branch grew too rapidly, the vine dresser would cut it back. Otherwise, it wouldn't be strong enough to bear the fruit that it might grow and could get snapped off by strong gusts of wind.

So the initial pruning requires patience. And it's analogous to the pruning that takes place early in the Christian life. God's purpose is to lay a foundation of which He will continue to build upon in the future.

An explosion of growth early on in a new Christian is possible, but like the branch that needs to be shaped, it may not be ready to produce the fruit that it bears and be crushed under the weight and unable to support it.

[14:05] It's not always the case, but I believe that's why Paul told Timothy not to put a new Christian in a prominent place within the church in 1 Timothy 3.6, because they weren't ready to be exposed to the dangers that could come with pridefulness if they weren't spiritually mature enough for that spot.

But one thing we learn from Scripture over and over again is that God is never in a panic. God never panics. He works on His own time.

And we have examples of Scripture of those who have been worked on by the Lord over time and who have been forced to be patient as they waited for Him.

Abraham, for example. Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, for another example, are all Old Testament examples of how God, over time, was preparing them to accomplish His purposes.

Sometimes His preparation was too slow for their liking, and so they would try to make things happen. And if you recall, whenever they tried to make things happen, they ended up causing a lot of problems, not only for themselves, but for others.

[15:24] Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed that was scattered on various kinds of soil in Matthew chapter 13 reinforces the point that a harvest takes time.

In fact, the only plant in Scripture that grew up overnight was Jonah's castor oil plant. And if you remember, it withered and it died the very next day.

In the initial pruning process, God is at work through His Word and through the indwelling of His Spirit to shape a believer. Long-term fruit is His goal.

And so it does no good to try to rush His long-term plans. Initial pruning takes time, but as that which would sap the branch of its strength is removed, the branch becomes stronger and stronger and more capable of producing fruit.

Initial pruning involves shaping and forming the branch for what it will become. And in that sense, that's a lot like how we discipline our children.

[16 : 32] The root word for discipline is disciple. Discipleship requires discipline. But we live in a culture that wants instant results and a culture that is afraid of getting its feelings hurt.

Our culture wants to get paid without working. People in our culture don't want to be corrected when they are wrong. They want to get promoted without earning it.

They'll tell you that they, well, they'll complain about anyone who tells them that what they're doing is wrong or tries to correct them. Just talk to a teacher.

Talk to a coach. Talk to a youth pastor. They'll tell you how they are attacked for trying to discipline their students or their athletes. And you know, the attack doesn't always come from the student or the athlete.

It's from the parents. It's crazy. While our society may view discipline as a bad thing, the Bible says that discipline is good. It's a good thing, especially in the life of a Christian.

[17 : 38] And it's something that a Christian should be thankful for. Hebrews 12, 6. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives.

Hebrews 12, 11. For at 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.

See, the vinedresser in Jesus' illustration is concerned not only for the initial shaping of the branch, but also its present production. The vinedresser is continually at work, pruning the branches, even as it begins to bear fruit.

To the untrained eye, his cuts may seem arbitrary and careless as his knife moves over the branch, piercing it and leaving a mound of waste at his feet.

But as Jesus' illustration indicates, the vinedresser is a master at his trade, and he always knows what he is doing. No cut that he makes is without a purpose or is too severe for the branch to recover from.

[18 : 50] When the vinedresser pierces the branch, he does it for its good. He does it knowing that doing so will mean it will bear more fruit in the future.

In the context of Hebrews 12, the discipline that the believers there were facing was a result of external persecution. And as we continue in John chapter 15, soon after Jesus' illustration here of the vine and the branches, he tells his disciples in verse 20, remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. So persecution is one way that we are pruned, but it's not the only way that the Father prunes us.

1 Peter 1, 6-7 says, In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

All different kinds. Various trials. Various things that prune you. So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[20 : 09] So the Bible makes it clear that your union with Christ is not isolated from your external life experiences. The Christian life is not lived on Candy Cane Lane where everything is lollipops and gumdrops and we go skipping around the world together, arm in arm.

It's a joyful life. It's a great life. But listen, it's real life. The Christian life is real life. We know that we're not here by accident.

We know the reality of sin and its consequences. We know that this world is under sin's curse and we know the depths to which God descended to rescue us from it.

We know that in this life there will be tribulation. But we, even as we endure tribulation, take heart because we know that Christ has overcome this world.

And we know that this world is not our home. And we know the truth that God governs all things. He is sovereign and He works providentially in His creation to bring all things together for the good.

[21 : 21] Romans 8, 28 makes clear. So persecution and hardships do not come to the branches willy-nilly. They are not aimless.

They are not random. They are the work of the vine dresser and they all have a purpose. It is through these pruning experiences that we are refined and we are reinforced.

It is through these pruning experiences that our faith is energized, intensified, and enlivened. I like what Sinclair Ferguson said about this passage.

He said, God knows what He is doing in every situation in our lives, not least in our darkest moments. Pain, times of disappointment, or sorrow all serve as His pruning knife.

His providence at times seems to cut deeply, but His purpose is to enable us to grow strong enough to bear new fruit. He prunes with perfect skill. We are tested but not beyond what we can bear.

[22 : 25] We experience sorrow, but He always provides comfort. But that comfort can be known only in sorrow, and it also equips us to comfort others in their sorrow too.

Jesus spoke of the Father's pruning from experience. He Himself was pruned in a sense during His earthly life.

Though He was without sin, He humbled Himself and He produced the sinless life that we needed to exchange our sinful one for. Hebrews 5.8 says of Him, although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.

And even as He was speaking to His disciples in John chapter 15, though He was on the verge of crucifixion, though He was being pruned so severely that He would cry out under the sharp pain of God's cuts, first in the garden of Gethsemane, asking if possible that He might be spared from them, then on the cross as He was forsaken by God, as He who knew no sin bore our sin and endured God's just punishment to save us.

His death is an example to us that the vine dresser makes no accidental slips with His knife. And it's through His death, it's through that pruning, that we live.

[23 : 51] Jesus was teaching His disciples here that they would experience persecution and sorrow. But He wanted them to know, just as He wants you and I to know, that when being pruned, your focus should not be on the knife, but on the hand that holds the knife.

And the hand that holds the knife knows what He is doing. And He does not make any wasteful or useless cuts. Amy Carmichael, as a matter of fact, many of our kids got a DVD, I think that came from Kendra, the Torchlighter series, on DVD 2, is the story of Amy Carmichael, so listen to that. But she was a young Irish Christian woman who was called into the mission field and she served in India. At a very young age, she started an orphanage for girls and then eventually one for boys. And she was used by God to impact hundreds of thousands, hundreds of lives, which then impacted further into that community. Thousands of people were touched by her ministry. She never married. She was married to her ministry and she never returned home when she went to India. And her life was not wasted in what she did to, or for the church, for the Lord.

[25 : 16] To the world, that might have seemed like a wasted life. But God used it again to impact thousands of people. And I love a prayer that she made. And she, a mature believer, understood what it meant to be pruned by the vine dresser.

Listen to her prayer. Rid me, good Lord, of every diverting thought. What prodigal waste it appears to be to be scattered on the floor, the bright green leaves and the bare stem, bleeding in a hundred places from the sharp steel.

But with a tried and trusted husbandman or vine dresser, there is not a random stroke in it all. Nothing cut away which it would have been lost to keep and gain to lose.

God's pruning is always done according to His wise and loving, sovereign purpose. And notice Jesus' words here.

Let's not forget this. That this pruning doesn't happen to some branches. He says, every branch that is in me will be pruned that it may bear more fruit.

[26 : 24] So, a true branch will be pierced by the vine dresser's pruning knife. That's the first principle. The second one is that a fruitful branch will produce fruit because it abides in Christ.

A fruitful branch will produce fruit because it abides in Christ. So, from verses 1 and 2, we understand that fruitless branches are destroyed and fruitful branches are disciplined.

But before moving on to the imperatives or the commands in verse 4, Jesus drops in a statement in verse 3. Look at that. He says, already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

This verse is probably the strangest sentence, I think, in the paragraph. The Greek word for prune found in verse 2 is the same as the word for cleanse found here in verse 3 and the word for clean in verse 3.

The father prunes and his pruning cleanses the branch and it makes it more suitable to produce fruit. And so, Jesus makes the point here before he goes on that the disciples are already clean, that they've already undergone some pruning.

[27 : 39] And so, Jesus says to them, if you recall back in John chapter 13 when he was washing their feet, remember when Peter objected to that, that he said to him, you shall never wash my feet.

Jesus answered, if I do not wash your feet, you have no share with me. And then Peter replied, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And then in verse 9, Jesus said, the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean and you are clean.

That's the same word here in John chapter 15 verse 3, but not every one of you, he said, because he knew obviously what Judas would do. So here's the point.

Here's the point in verse 3. The word Jesus referred to stands for his entire ministry. That he is the eternal son of God, which John 1, 1 through 3 says.

That he is the eternal word of God who became flesh, as John 1, 14 says. That he is without sin, as John 8, 46 says. That he will die for his sheep, as John 3, 15 and 10, 17 say.

[28 : 47] And will rise from the dead, as John 10, 18 mentioned. So, believing in his message is believing in his word.

And his word is what God uses to join the branch, you, to the vine, Jesus. And the moment that connection is made, the disciple is completely clean.

clean. Turn back to John 5, 24. Look at what Jesus said there about this. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life.

There's nothing more for you to do. You have eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. So, in verse 3, I believe that Jesus is making it clear to his disciples that they have passed from death to life.

They will never be cut away from the vine. They have no fear of being, they should have no fear of being destroyed. And so, before giving the commands to them to abide in him, Jesus wanted to make sure first that they and we understand how commands work for those who are truly in the vine, for those who are truly his disciples.

[30 : 05] Christians abide in the vine not so that they will be saved, but because they are saved. We want to abide in the vine because we know what he has done for us to save us from our sins.

And so, the Father continues to prune us, continues to shape us into what we already are. And that's what Jesus makes clear in verses 4-5.

Look at those again. 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 fruit for apart from me you can do nothing. So, those who abide in him are those who are permanently united to him by the Father through faith in his word, the gospel.

only those who are in Christ bear fruit and they will bear fruit. According to these verses, there is no such thing as a fruitless Christian.

[31 : 19] Jesus said in Matthew 7, 17-20, so every healthy tree bears good 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, talking about those who truly believe, who are truly united to him by their fruits.

So, again, a healthy tree is a tree without disease. It is a tree that is properly nourished. It's a tree that then produces fruit. So, it is with those who have been united to Christ.

But what is the fruit, we might ask, that is being produced by us? Often, we think of the fruit only in an external sense.

But Scripture defines fruit in terms of its spiritual qualities. For example, in Galatians 5, 22-23, the Apostle Paul says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[32 : 27] Against such things there is no law. These are the natural things that come out of one who has been transformed by the gospel, who has been truly saved. Also, praise offered to God is

fruit.

Hebrews 13-15 says, through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. So, when we gather as a church and we worship and we praise God, we are bearing fruit for him.

The Bible also describes monetary gifts which support the advancement of the gospel as fruit. In Philippians 4-17, Paul acknowledges the financial support of the church towards his ministry and how their selfless giving was tangible proof that they were truly united with Christ.

In verse 17, he says, not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. So, there is in giving, like we gave to Lottie Moon an offering for the advancement of the gospel, there is fruit that will result from that, not just in our giving, but to those who we give, I should say, but also in the fact that we have given.

God is at work in that. The Bible also defines fruit as behavior that honors God. It's a godly life. Such conduct is fruit keeping in repentance, as Matthew 3-8 says.

[33 : 51] Paul encouraged the Colossians in Colossians 1-10, to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

And then finally, the Bible defines fruit as those who are saved by God through the sharing of the gospel. In John 4, Jesus reveals Himself to the Samaritan woman as the Messiah, if you remember. And then she returns to her village with the news that the Messiah had come. And as she led many from her community to the place where Jesus was, He said to His disciples, Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

Again, those who have been grafted into the vine will bear these kinds of fruit. And so the question that we need to ask ourselves when we consider this is, is that kind of fruit evident in your life?

And we know the sin nature still remains. We know that we fight that battle and we struggle. We know that we're not always in the most chipper of moods, but man, it should be apparent from the day that you've known Christ as your Lord and Savior, that you have been increasing in these things.

[35 : 26] As Jesus continues in verse 7, he makes the connection with fruit bearing to abiding in his word. In verses 7 and 8, he says, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and prove to be my disciples. You see, God wants you to bear fruit. He desires that you bear fruit.

He wants to use your life. He wants to use you to glorify him and in glorifying him you will find the greatest joy that there can be experienced in this world.

And as we look at verse 9, we see that he wants you to abide in his love. And abiding in his love means that you keep his commandments which are contained, again, within his word.

Look at verses 9 and 10. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, if you keep my word, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

[36 : 26] Then in verse 11, he adds, these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full. So here we see that Jesus' words bring joy.

The words that he's just spoken to his disciples were meant to bring them joy. It's his inspired word. It's the Bible, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, which cuts away whatever gets in the way of producing more fruit. And the more you abide in his word, the more in line you will be with his will when you pray.

and your prayers will reflect that very thing. As God uses his word to prune you by convicting you of sin, so he uses it also to nourish you, to remind you, to fill your mind and your heart with the promises that he has for you, that he's made to you in his word, reminding you of his love, reminding you of the fact that he has a place for you eternally in his kingdom, and that if you obey them, you will experience more joy in your Christian life.

All this to say that Jesus makes it clear that abiding in his word is critical to your spiritual health. It's critical not only to your spiritual health, but to the health of your family and to the health of this church, the best thing that you can do for yourself and for your family and for our church and for our community right now is to immerse yourself in God's word.

[38 : 28] But how tragic it is that we don't. We don't. Let's be honest. We've got Bibles sitting on shelves that are under an inch of dust.

And for many of us, for many Christians, the only time we open the Bible is on Sunday morning. Think about eating once a week. It's not enough, is it? We ignore its instruction and we get ourselves in all kinds of problems.

For Christmas, Jack got a basketball goal and it came with one of those confusing instruction books.

Yeah, I wanted to. And I was thinking, aren't we at the point where can't we just put it all on video? Why are we still using paper for this? And thankfully, my dad was there, so I had a partner. My mom was outside and she was reading the directions to us and telling us what we were doing right or what we were doing wrong. And I mean, right from the get-go, we were dumbfounded by an instruction.

[39 : 39] And so, I had to call my brother-in-law, who has put together a basketball goal before, and get him on the phone, on FaceTime, and show him, you know, this is what we're at, are we doing it the right way? Yeah, he's kind of looking, yeah, you're on the right track.

Okay, okay. So we get going and we get to the point where we're near the end and it asks for a spring to just be attached through a metal rod in the back.

Okay, and we did that, and then in the instruction book it has us move to a whole other area of the goal, which I thought that can't be right because we have this useless spring right here, we must have missed a step.

And so I see another metal rod that looks like those two should connect to, and so me and my dad kind of talk about it and we agree that, yeah, we think that we missed something, and my mom's saying, no, I don't think that you did or anything, you know, I think that we just need to keep moving on.

Well, you know, we decided that we knew better, or at least I did, and so I pulled this, I mean, it's a heavy duty spring, it's one of those major springs that you see, and I'm pulling it up so that my dad can put the rod through the holes and then through the spring.

[40 : 48] Well, he got it through and then he couldn't get the rod through the rest of the way, so my finger was stuck between a metal rod and a spring, and it hurt.

And I was telling my dad, and I was trying to pull it, I was like, dad, it hurts, dad, it hurts, and he's trying to pull the other way, and I mean, my finger is in there for now, it feels like it's been 30 seconds, it feels like it's been a couple of hours, and in my mind I'm thinking, we're not going to get my finger out of this thing, I'm going to lose it, they're going to have to cut it or something, I don't know what's going to happen, it being in this spot for so long, and so my mind is thinking, you know, this is the day, Christmas 2021, that I lost part of my finger, but then miraculously, you know, just through adrenaline and, you know, probably the Lord's help getting us through that situation, my finger came loose, but man, it was smashed down as far as it could go.

And so I use that illustration because I think that when it comes to our Bible, we get in the same kind of messes. Look, sometimes we read something in Scripture and it doesn't quite make sense to us, but that's what, like I called my brother-in-law, help me to figure this out.

Look, you've got people around you, you've got someone like me, our elders, our deacons, you've got Sunday school teachers, you've got men and women in our church who know the Word well. If you get stuck at a point in Scripture, don't stop, ask your questions.

Man, I love it when people ask questions about the Bible. And again, the more we read God's Word, the more we receive the instruction that we need for our lives, the less likely we're getting to get into those points where we get our finger caught in something that we shouldn't have.

[42 : 30] So here's the main point of application. Christians who produce fruit abide in Christ and they trust the hand that prunes.

Christians who produce fruit abide in Christ, which means they're in His Word too, right? They're immersing themselves in it. And when He prunes, they trust that He knows what He's doing. Whenever there's something in their life that they know that is in violation of what His Word says, they let Him sever it because they know that He loves them more than anyone loves them. And they let Him cut it. And they don't really have to let Him. He'll cut it anyways. You know what I'm saying? You don't have to ask God to do anything. He'll just do it. But you trust in what He's doing because you know that whatever He cuts is for your good.

Three questions of application. Question number one. How have you been pierced by God's pruning knife? Just think about how, if you've known the Lord for a while, look back over your life and over those things, over those times, those ways that He has pruned you.

[43 : 43] And then, what good have you seen result from that? Just reflect over what you've seen God do in your life as He's pruned you. Question number two.

How does this text contradict the health and wealth gospel? Who would say that being pruned means you're not doing something right. You're not having enough faith. That's not what the Bible says. How does this text contradict the health and wealth gospel?

According to verse seven, what criteria must be met for answered prayer? And then, question three. What is the key to producing fruit in the life of a Christian?

What is the key to producing fruit in the life of a Christian? Go back through and read through these verses again. And what responsibility does a Christian have in bearing fruit?

Now, before I pray, I do have a gift for you today. And it is a Bible reading plan. Look, man, I'm telling you that you need to be immersed in God's Word.

[44 : 48] The Lord is telling you to do that. Do it. Here is a reading plan. This was developed by Robert Murray McShane, a Scottish pastor and theologian of the 19th century.

Four chapters a day from different books of the Bible. You do that 365 days, you'll have read the Bible from cover to cover. And I'm telling you that because of this.

I believe, and my hope and my prayer for our church this year is that our people will be more in the Word than they've ever been.

And that's one of my prayers when I preach is that God uses this sermon not only to convict me and us of sin, but to draw us into your Word more deeply, to see how good it is and how blessed we are to have it, how much it nourishes us, that we just want more and more and more.

And so these are on the table outside in the foyer. I've got plenty. If for some reason we run out and you want more, just ask me. It's January 2nd, so you've got some reading to do.

[45 : 52] Amen? But I really hope that you will do that because listen, you will be so blessed by it. And our church will be so blessed. Our community will be blessed to have a church full of people who know God's Word well, who abide in His Word and abide in Christ.

Let's pray. Lord God, we thank You that You do discipline us. And Lord, we know that we live in a society that despises discipline.

And Lord, forgive us that sometimes we take more after them than we do after You and the instruction in Your Word. Lord, it's hard to be pruned.

And I know that this room is filled with people whom You have pruned in ways that cut deep. Yet, God, as we know You and as we know Your Word, that You don't do anything without purpose.

That there's always a reason. And God, if we would look intently at our lives and see what You've done and how You've done it, we'll notice how You've used those things to draw us near to You, to make us want this world less and want You more.

[47 : 13] So, Lord, I pray for those who are currently being pruned. God, I pray that they would trust in the hand that holds the knife. That they would know that whatever they're going through as a Christian, You're going to use it for their good.

And I pray that they would just continue to persevere in faith. God, I pray that as a church, we would be more immersed in Your Word.

Lord, I pray that we would not neglect our Bibles or the study of them. I pray that You would motivate us to just fill our hearts and our minds daily with the Word of God.

That You would use us, Lord, to bear fruit for You. And that we would truly be a blessing to our families, to our friends, to our church, to one another, and to our community.

Lord, I pray that in 2022, there would be much fruit born here for You. And that You would be well-pleased with what results in this church.

[48 : 20] We are Yours, Lord. Use us as You see fruit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.