

## Pruned for His Glory

John 15:1-5

Why is it that when life feels most chaotic—our calendars full, our energy drained—we feel the least spiritually alive? What if the very chaos we’re resisting is what God is pruning to make room for real growth?

We look across life’s horizon and see endless opportunities—to get healthier, earn more, climb the ladder, and improve ourselves. It’s no wonder we feel so driven to chase after something more. We start off dreaming big, imagining the disciplines we’ll adopt, the habits we’ll form, the lives we’ll build. But then reality hits: greatness, however we define it, always demands change and sacrifice. And truth be told, few of us are truly ready for the cost. Like a shiny lure before a fish, the promises of personal growth dangle before us—but beneath the surface, our hearts are already overloaded. Our calendars are full, our strength is drained, and we’re just trying to keep up. For many, routine has become the foundation for survival in a fast-paced world. But while it helps us cope, it can also become a prison—a comfortable cage that keeps us from the transformation God desires to bring.

And so today, we ask: What if there’s more than just surviving? What if there’s freedom, growth, and purpose on the other side of surrender? What if the very act of being pruned for His glory is the key to becoming who God created us to be?

Upon deeper reflection, we begin to realize that it’s not worldly significance we’re truly chasing—but the approval of our Father in heaven. From an eternal perspective, our deepest desire is to walk in step with our Creator, fulfilling His “good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Romans 12:2b). As we open the pages of Scripture, we’re stirred by the unwavering faith of Abraham, who left everything to follow God into the unknown. We’re inspired by Job, who worshiped through unspeakable suffering. We long for the boldness of Moses, who stood before Pharaoh and declared, “Let my people go!” If only we could cast off the chains of worldly distraction and learn the secret of being content in all circumstances, perhaps we too could rest like David—“lying down in green pastures, led beside still waters” (Psalm 23:2), listening for the gentle whisper of God (1 Kings 19:12). Does not the One who desires that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9) also stand at the door of our hearts and knock (Revelation 3:20)? He patiently waits to be invited in—not just to comfort us, but to remove the thorns of self-reliance and reshape us into the image of His Son.

Two weeks ago, we began an exciting new sermon series entitled “**Rooted.**” In week one, we explored the Parable of the Sower, where the Seed represents the Word of God, the **Sower** is Jesus Himself, and the outcome—whether that seed grows into saving faith or withers—is determined by the condition of the human heart. For those whose hearts are tender, receptive, and surrendered, the seed of the gospel takes root and produces lasting fruit. In week

two, we reflected on how spiritual growth is a lifelong journey—a process of transformation empowered by God’s grace, sustained through daily surrender to the Holy Spirit, nurtured in Christ-centered community, and aimed at becoming more like Jesus for the glory of God. This week, we take the next step. If we truly desire to become more like Jesus, we must invite the Father to prune away the hardness, the rocky places, and the thorny concerns that still cling to our hearts—so they might be filled instead with His will and righteousness.

As we turn to Scripture and consider the roles of both the Gardener and the Vine, ask yourself: *Am I truly ready to embrace change?* Pray that the Holy Spirit would lovingly convict you—to confess sin, to surrender unhealthy patterns, and even to release some good things, perhaps even ministries you cherish, to bear even greater fruit for His glory.

## The Gardener and the Vine

For us to allow anyone to speak truth into our lives—and not only that, but to command us to change—we must know that person is completely trustworthy. We need a Champion whose motives are pure, whose wisdom is perfect, and whose love for us is infinite—One who can see through our divided hearts (James 1:5–8), and not only point the way, but empower us to live lives worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27). But before we can fully trust someone with that kind of authority over our hearts and habits, we need to know their qualifications. In John 15:1, Jesus declares, “I am the Vine, and My Father is the Gardener.” No better Champions of our righteousness could ever be found. Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), not only to atone for our sins (John 3:16), but also to become the source of our spiritual life and fruitfulness. He is the Vine—through whom all spiritual life flows. Just as every nutrient a branch needs to grow comes through the trunk, so every grace we need for life and godliness flows through Jesus. He gives not just life, but life to the full (John 10:10).

And while Jesus is the source of that life, the Father’s role is equally essential. He is the Gardener who lovingly prunes our words, thoughts, and actions—not to harm us, but to make us even more fruitful. Only He who created our inmost being and knit us together in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139) is fully qualified to search, evaluate, and transform us according to His good, pleasing, and perfect will (Romans 12:2). What a staggering honor—to be shaped by the One who created the sun, moon, stars, and all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16). He takes the hard and rocky parts of our hearts—fractured by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16)—and lovingly reshapes them like clay in His hands, molding us into the glorious image He has predestined us to bear (Romans 8:29).

## The Pain and the Promise

And while we may gladly welcome the idea of spiritual growth, we often overlook the reality that growth comes at a cost. It requires the pruning hand of God—and that often means He doesn't just remove obvious sin, but even good things that are not from Him or ultimately for Him. Like a plant left untended, we too can grow wild sprawling in every direction, investing time and energy into pursuits that look alive but are unsustainable, developing root systems that can't support the weight of our overextended lives.<sup>1</sup> God, in His infinite wisdom, knows that even though self-control is a gift of the Holy Spirit, we often lack it in practice. We cram our calendars with activities, constantly striving to optimize our wealth, health, reputation, and connections. We overspend to keep up appearances, chasing pleasures that never satisfy. And though we have been born again and adopted into God's family, that doesn't mean we have mastered the art of contentment or the discipline of self-control. Our loving Father knows this—and so, like a wise Gardener, He prunes. To run the race of life well, God often examines and cuts away the excess. He does this not out of cruelty, but out of tough love.

I remember a time in my youth when that phrase, "tough love," came to life. I loved playing video games, especially Pac-Man. One night, I played for nearly twelve hours straight, having discovered a pattern that kept me from losing. I was sleep-deprived, but I kept chasing my next personal high score. When my parents found me still glued to the screen the next morning, they were far from impressed. Not only did they pull the plug, but they also severely limited my gaming time going forward. At the time, I thought it was a cruel punishment. But looking back, I now realize left unchecked, even good things can become idols—false gods that enslave the heart.

In the same way, our Heavenly Father prunes us through discipline. When we become enslaved by our activities, finances, or relationships, He may allow hardship, loss, or correction—not to condemn us, but to refocus our hearts on what truly matters. God does not punish us for every sin. He is full of grace and mercy. But when we become ensnared in sin—when we begin to love its pleasures more than His presence—He intervenes. He disciplines not to destroy, but to remove what glorifies the flesh and restore us to fruitfulness in Him. Though discipline is painful, it is priceless in the life of a believer. The author of Hebrews puts it this way:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

— Hebrews 12:5–6

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<sup>1</sup> Tara Dew, [Overflowing Joy: What Jesus Says about a Joy-Filled Life](#) (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2024).

God disciplines us because He loves us. He refuses to let us live wild, uncontrolled lives, filling our days with things that only glorify the flesh. Instead, He calls us to seek His ways, which are infinitely higher than our own (Isaiah 55:9), and to seek first His kingdom—trusting that all else will be added in His time (Matthew 6:33). By pruning away the sinful and fruitless areas of our lives, He creates space in our overburdened calendars to “take time to be holy.” He invites us to slow down, to rest in His presence, and to allow our roots to grow deep into His Word and into the Vine, through whom we have abundant life and lasting fruit.

## The Purpose of Pruning: More Fruit, Deeper Roots

If you're wondering what divine pruning looks like in real life, let's turn to a man God trimmed down to nearly nothing—yet used mightily. At the beginning of Judges chapter 6, we're told that “Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years He gave them into the hands of the Midianites.” With the help of the Amalekites and other eastern peoples, the Midianites ravaged the land, ruined the crops, and left no sheep, cattle, or donkeys alive (Judges 6:3–4). The Israelites were powerless, oppressed, and desperate. When they cried out to the Lord, God didn't raise up a mighty warrior or a battle-hardened general. He sent an angel to a fearful man named Gideon, who was so afraid he was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide from the enemy (Judges 6:11). Gideon saw himself as completely unqualified: “My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (6:15). But God replied, “Go in the strength you have... I will be with you” (6:14, 16).

Though fearful and reluctant<sup>2</sup>—so much so that he asked for multiple signs with fleeces—Gideon obeyed. Even though he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he tore down his father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it (6:27–28). That took courage, conviction, and trust in God. But perhaps the most striking act of divine pruning came when Gideon gathered an army. After the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, he blew a trumpet and gathered over 30,000 men (Judges 6:34–35). But God said, “That's too many.” Lest Israel boast in their own strength, the Lord instructed Gideon to announce that anyone who was afraid could go home—and 20,000 men left. But even the remaining 10,000 were too many. So God refined the army once more—choosing only those who drank water in a certain way, leaving Gideon with just 300 men (Judges 7:5–7). Then, with torches, trumpets, and jars, God led Gideon and his small band to victory, as the enemy turned on themselves in chaos (7:22). No swords. No full battalions. Just obedience, weakness, and the power of God.

This story shows us that God often prunes not just what is dead, but even what appears fruitful—so that we don't rely on our own strength but on His. Gideon wasn't weakened to fail—he was pruned for His glory, that the victory would point to God alone. Just as in the Parable of the Sower, God is looking not just for fruit, but for a harvest that multiplies 30, 60, or 100-fold.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert G. Boling, “[Gideon \(Person\)](#),” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1014.

Jesus said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He cuts off, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2). To the untrained eye, pruning looks like loss. Why cut back a branch that’s already producing? Why stop a ministry that’s bearing fruit? Why remove something that seems good?

But here’s the hard truth: not everything good is God’s best. What if you’re a Sunday School teacher, a missionary, a pastor, a healer, or an evangelist—and God asks you to lay it down? What if He says, “This season is over”? What if He removes something you’ve poured your heart into, even though you’ve seen people grow through it? That’s when trust is tested. Just like Gideon had to trust God enough to burn down his family’s idols and face an army with a fraction of the expected resources, we too must trust when God prunes our lives—even when it doesn’t make sense. If we truly believe that God’s ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9), then we must also trust the hands of the Master Gardener when He picks up the shears. We must welcome the Potter when He molds the clay of our lives. Even when the pruning is painful, even when the change is confusing, let us obey and rejoice. For in the Father’s loving hands, there is deep intimacy, amazing grace, and an abundance of fruit yet to come.

## Abiding in the Vine: The Only way to Bear Fruit

While the Father’s pruning prepares us for growth, it is our union with Christ that brings growth to life. Apart from Him, we don’t thrive—we wither. The One who atoned for our sins is not just our Savior—He is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6) for all who are called by His name. His grace, mercy, wisdom, and joy flow through our lives like sap through the branches of a healthy vine<sup>3</sup>—nourishing every part of us. As those who have been made partakers in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6-7). By His power, we can now say no to the flesh and choose to live lives marked by holiness. The key to bearing much fruit is this: “Christ’s life in the Christian.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus tells us plainly in John 15:4–5 that we cannot bear fruit on our own. If we choose to live disconnected from the Vine—wandering the broad road of never-ending distractions, overstuffed calendars, and self-focused pleasures—we will remain spiritually barren. We must abide in Christ if we are to bear fruit—especially through the adversities and trials that inevitably come in this fallen world. Even in seasons of radical pruning, we must trust

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<sup>3</sup> Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [Exalting Jesus in John](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 305–306.

<sup>4</sup> Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, [Exalting Jesus in John](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 306.

the process and remain rooted in Him.<sup>5</sup> For in due season, we will bear abundant fruit, not for our recognition, but for His glory alone.

## Trust the Gardener: His Love, His Wisdom, His Ways

But for all of this to matter—for pruning to be fruitful and abiding to be effective—we must learn to trust the Gardener, whose wisdom is infinite and whose hands never make a mistake. When you hear the word “wisdom,” perhaps you think of a grandparent, a parent, a sibling, or a trusted friend—someone whose life experience, grey hair, or steady discernment has helped guide you through difficult decisions. These heroes of the faith can certainly offer insight and encouragement, and their wisdom is often a gift from God. But even the wisest among us are nothing in comparison to the perfect, unfathomable wisdom of our heavenly Gardener. As Job 12:13 declares: “To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are His.” And Jeremiah 10:12 reminds us: “But God made the earth by His power; He founded the world by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding.”

Who is more qualified to prune the sinful and unfruitful parts of our lives than the One who formed us in the womb, who sees the end from the beginning, and who lovingly shapes us for His glory?

When life doesn’t make sense...

When trials press in and tribulations threaten to crush our souls...

When we stand on the mountaintops of fleeting pleasure or sink into the valleys of despair...

We must trust the Gardener with the parts of our lives we can’t control—because He already holds them in His hands. Even when the shears are sharp and the cuts go deep, we are being lovingly pruned for His glory.

He is not distant or indifferent. He is personal, loving, and wise. And though His pruning may be painful, it is always an act of grace and mercy. Like a Potter with clay, He lovingly reshapes us—chiseling away what is unholy, reshaping what is broken, and conforming us to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [\*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 1163–1164.

## Conclusion

We have but one life to live—and oh, how easily we fill it with distractions, ambitions, and pursuits that may look fruitful but leave us spiritually dry. Yet the Gardener, in His perfect wisdom, calls us to something far better: a life rooted in Christ, pruned by the Father, and filled with fruit that lasts. Yes, pruning is painful. Yes, abiding takes surrender. But the reward is worth it—a life overflowing with the presence of Jesus, a heart aligned with the will of God, and a legacy of fruit that brings glory not to ourselves, but to Him.

So today, let me ask you:

What is God pruning from your life right now?

Are you resisting the shears, or trusting the hands that hold them?

Are you abiding in Christ daily, or running on spiritual fumes?

Are you bearing fruit that will last, or just managing survival?

If the Father is pruning you, rejoice—He sees more in you than you see in yourself. If the Spirit is calling you back to the Vine, respond—for only in Him is true life found. Let us not settle for shallow roots and fleeting fruit. Let us welcome the pruning. Let us remain in Christ. Let us trust the Gardener. Let us welcome His pruning, remain in His Vine, and rejoice—even in the cutting. For in His hands, our lives will not only grow—they will be pruned for His glory, and flourish for our eternal good.

This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit—showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). This is what it means to live a life pruned for His glory—fruitful, faithful, and rooted in Christ.

Lord, help us to surrender to your pruning hand. Make us fruitful, not for our fame, but for your glory. Amen.