



CONNECTED -

(SERMON SERIES ON THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES)

(From 9/17/17 sermon - Spencer)

I. **OPEN** - See if there is anyone who wants to share a short testimony, or if there are there specific praise updates to begin CG.

II. **PRAY**

III. **READ ALOUD** John 15:1-4 - *“ I am the True Vine, and my Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 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.”*

**Be sure to take time to slowly walk through this passage, preferably having a Bible teacher provide context and overview.*

Q - Sermon takeaways from those who were in attendance? (Spend time receiving reflections from those who were in the service.)

IV. **REFLECT**

We are jumping into a new series titled Connecting (a study on The Vine and the Branches based out of John 15). Jesus is preparing for his departure. We can see this throughout chapters 12-17 of John's Gospel. In this particular passage Jesus begins teaching them about The Vine. Throughout the Old Testament, the vine is portrayed as the nation of Israel and it is always portrayed negatively. When researching the Old Testament's influence on John 15, Psalm 80 is the most famous parallel passage.

- Israel is seen as the vine and the Son of Man is mentioned.
- We see God as the cultivator and gardener...The Father Farmer.
- Isaiah has two 'vineyard songs' in chapters 5 and 27, where God carefully cultivated Israel, but Israel yielded such bad fruit.

If you look closely at what the Scriptures say about our Heavenly Father, we seem him portrayed as a Farmer God. Our God is seen spading, clearing, planting, and taking care of the vineyard. (Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80). We see God as the Vinedresser walking the rows everyday...a form of shepherding the berries from bud to harvest. If the vinedresser is anything, he is hands-on. As we peer into one of the Father's roles, it is one that is intimate. He is seen walking row by row, examining each plant, and touching each and every branch.

This is the Father's hands-on approach with you and me. It's relational. It's intimate. **Q - Do you see God as a hands-on God who is intimately involved in every detail of your life, or do you see Him as being distant? Why does it matter which way you view Him? Discuss. After discussing, slowly read Psalm 139:1-16. Which view does this passage support...intimate or distant?**

John 15:2 says that our Father Gardener PRUNES our branches so that we may bear more fruit. To understand this passage it's important that we see pruning as a positive and not a negative. Taking away and pruning must happen for the fruit to bear. The branch has done it's job, and a good job at that. But, that branch will never bear fruit ever again. It now has to make room for others. So, what the vinedresser is doing, is making room for more growth and fruit. Without clearing things out, this fruit would never be optimal. You may have great looking vines and the branches and foliage might be amazing, but you would not be able to bear very good fruit. Pruning is necessary. Pruning is good. Without pruning, the branches get too far from the trunk or the main vine. It's absolutely murder on the main vine. New growth is the only thing that produces fruit. There is no such thing as a multiyear fruit-bearing branch. Pruning is essential. Again, pruning is good and is absolutely necessary for good fruit to be produced.

Read Hebrews 12:5-11 - Discuss the connection with this passage and pruning found in John 15. Do you have a story of pruning that you initially saw as painful and negative but later saw as positive and from the hands of a Loving Father? Share with one another.

V. FURTHER APPLICATION -

When we begin to see pruning as positive, as well as credit it with fruit bearing, then we should work hard at linking fruit with pruning. Begin looking at the spiritual fruit of your life and see where pruning has taken place. **Q - Where have you seen pruning in your life? As you trust the omnipresence of God, you will begin giving credit to the Lord. Have you been able to celebrate that which is pruned? Have you been able to celebrate what pruning has produced in you?**

VI. BE ON MISSION - Is there someone going through the pruning process right now that could use a word of encouragement from you?

VII. LOOKING AHEAD-

We encourage all CG members to continue reading, praying, and worshipping through John 15 each week.