

# DAY 38

# PRUNE



John 15.2

*"The Father removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit."*

This particular text, this particular teaching of Jesus, is one of my all-time favorites. I am drawn to this teaching because I believe it is the simplest expression of our task to following Jesus and discipleship.

And Jesus couldn't offer a more simplistic vision..." Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." The fundamental

task of following Jesus is to "remain" or "Abide" in him. It is organizing our life around staying connected to the "vine." This is the life-long task of following Jesus; it invades our major moments of decision making. Where to live, what career to pursue, friends to associate with, neighbors to love, justice to work for, etc. But it also invades our mundane moments of life as we learn to live into the availability of the Kingdom of God here-and-now. While we do dishes and laundry, and cook dinner, and clean the floor, commute to work, walk the dog, etc.

The aim of our life with Jesus is to cultivate a rhythm of life that stays connected to God in all things. This teaching reminds me of one of my favorite quotes by Dallas Willard. Willard says this,

"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds...This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus, "practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our 'practicing,' we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits - not the law of gravity - and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings." - Dallas Willard.

This is what it looks like to learn to "abide" in him. To constantly keep God in our minds so that the orientation of our hearts is constantly drawn toward God, in the same way, a needle of a compass is naturally drawn toward north.

BUT...This is much easier said than done. The process of learning to abide in Him requires work, pain, and the work of the Holy Spirit. This is how we come to our word of the day, "prune." For all of us, our lives are not set up in such a way that our hearts are naturally pulled toward God. We have "branches" of our lives that deter us from the presence of God, whether it is outright sinful practices, or morally neutral things that deter our hearts from seeking God. And this is what Jesus is offering in this text, the process of pruning our lives so that we can receive greater connection with God.

Pruning helps trees bear healthy fruit. But the irony is that it doesn't make them look more beautiful, but rather more fruitful. Unnecessary branches must be pruned, cut off, so that the tree can produce all the fruit it can. This pruning comes from God himself. Our good father, gently and graciously prunes those areas for our own good.

Often this pruning occurs when we experience hardship and humiliation. Through difficult times, we are challenged to recognize God's pruning hand. Only then will we be accepting of God's cleansing work in our lives instead of resisting it.

### **Daily Practice**

Ask God to reveal to you how selfishness and self-centeredness gets expressed in your relationships. Pray for God to gently prune you of your resistance to love.

The below reflections are written by congregants & staff of CPC. All reflections are following Trevor Hudson's book *Pauses for Lent* and are both heavily influenced and borrowed from his work. Any quotes without attribution should be credited to him.