

INTRO: Let's get right into the sermon today. Read with me from John 15.

Pastor Wayne's Paraphrase: **John 15:1-8** (On Screen, on 2 or 3 slides)

1. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener and keeper of the vine.  
 2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He does away with. And every branch that does bear fruit, He trims and prunes it, so that it will produce even more fruit. 3. Now, you have already been pruned and trimmed because of the Word which I have spoken to you. 4. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. It's like this, a branch cannot bear fruit on it's own, it get's it's life from the vine. And neither can you bear fruit unless you continue to grow in me, (it's that simple).  
 5. I am the vine and you are the branches. The one that remains in me, and consequently, I in him, will bring about an abundance of fruit. But without me, you can't do a single solitary thing. 6. If a person chooses to not remain in me, he will be cut off and then become dried up, only to be gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. 7. Now, if you continue to remain in me, and my Words continue to remain in you, you can ask for whatever you desire, and it will be done for you.  
 8. What brings glory to my Father is this, that you bear an abundance of fruit. Do that, and you will be my disciples."

What's your least favorite season of the year? Don't say football. Some of you women looked like you wanted to say football. For most of us in the south, winter is our least favorite season. We don't know how to handle the cold, do we? If it get's below 50 degrees we get nervous. We'll go clean a grocery store out of bread and milk if it starts to rain and it's a little chilly outside. If the weather man says anything about snow we freak out. We'll go out and put snow tires on our kids bicycles, just getting all crazy. For those of us who grew up in the south, we just don't know how to weather the winter.

I think the same thing is true of Christians and the winter seasons of our lives. And by winter, I'm talking about any hard times in our lives that come and chill us to the bone. Most of us have never been taught from the Word of God how to weather the winter of our lives.

Now, let's not try to quantify what qualifies as a difficult season or not. A difficult season could be...you lost a loved one or family member this year...or it could be that you or a family member has a serious illness that your dealing with...or it could be that you're in need, serious need, of a better job just so you can pay your bills...or you may have a good job, and good health, but you don't have a spouse or children, and that's tough. So it's not really helpful to compare who's winter is worse. Just suffice it to say, we all go through winter seasons in our lives, and it's always hard.

The mistake that so many make when someone they know is going through a difficult season is speculating as to the REASON for that season in their life. I've heard sermons that almost blame those going through hard times for the season their in. NOW IT'S TRUE we do have a responsibility in the way we live our lives. And sometimes we put ourselves in situations that will bring about a whirlwind effect. I mean, if you go out and charge \$30,000 in credit card debt, there's a good chance you will go through a season of hardship financially. And if you smoke 3 packs of cigarettes a day for 30 years, there's a good chance you'll get sick. There is a consequence to our actions. But not everything we go through is our fault, or could have been avoided. Sometimes life just kicks us in the teeth and we're left dealing with the fall out. **SO TODAY I'M NOT SO CONCERNED ABOUT THE REASON BEHIND OUR WINTER, I WANT TO DISCUSS OUR RESPONSE TO IT.**

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2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He does away with. And every branch that does bear fruit, He trims and prunes it, so that it will produce even more fruit...5. I am the vine and you are the branches. The one that remains in me, and consequently, I in him, will bring about an abundance of fruit. But without me, you can't do a single solitary thing... 8. What brings glory to my Father is this, that you bear an abundance of fruit. Do that, and you will be my disciples."

Even in the hard times of our lives, those cold months of winter, we still have a responsibility to prepare for the growing season.

In church life, there is always seasons of growth and seasons of winter. A time to prepare for growth and a time for growth. So, what is it that sees us through our winter seasons and prepares us for the growth that's ahead for us? Notice...

**I) The Process:** v 1 What most of us never learn in life is that in everything we go through, God has a lesson for us. And you'll never understand what God's doing until you learn to quit asking WHY, and start asking WHAT. What, God, can I learn from this awful experience. Teach me Lord. The question, WHAT, has the ability to change your perception. Ask Him, God, WHAT are you preparing me for? Or in some cases, WHAT are you preparing for me?

The thing that's difficult about winter is, you can't see what's happening underground to prepare for spring. Jesus says here in v 1, my Father is the gardener. NOW, we're not a very agricultural people here at CFC, generally speaking. Going to Whole Foods doesn't count, your organic self, gluten free self doesn't make you a farmer...BUT CHECK IT OUT, Jesus said, my Father knows how to farm, He knows how to grow stuff, HE understands the PROCESS of growth. So when you submit yourself to the process of the Heavenly Father, the growth of your soul is in good hands.

It may be winter now, but spring is just around the corner. It's necessary for winter to come. The soil needs to rest and rejuvenate. The process is important for continued growth and God knows that. He's a farmer! He's a gardener that knows what we need.

Listen, I understand that my sermon may not be able to take your pain away. But maybe together with God's help, we can discover a PURPOSE in your pain. It's a PROCESS...don't give up hope! Learn to appreciate the winter for WHAT it brings!

I don't know all the REASONS behind your pain. I don't know why you feel so lonely, I don't know why there was an empty place at your dinner table this Christmas. And we're not always responsible for the REASONS, but we are responsible for our RESPONSE.

**II) The Pruning:** v 2 So we read here that if you don't stay vitally connected with God, He cuts you off. But if you do stay connected and produce fruit, He cuts you back. Either way you get cut! There's this thinking in the church that if you're a Christian you never get cut, nothing should ever go wrong, that everything should be easy and painless. That's not the truth. Even the greatest Christians from time to time need to be pruned so they can continue to bring forth fruit. But I have determined in my mind that I'd rather be cut back, than cut off. If it's the cutting back process that keeps me bearing fruit, that keeps me from being cut off, then so be it. I'd rather go through hell WITH God, than to go through it WITHOUT Him. So, whatever keeps me connected to God is good for me!

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**I) The Process:** v 1

**II) The Pruning:** v 2 *continued* **ILLUS:** I don't know why some people suffer. I don't know why Marty McRae, my dear friend, has had to suffer with bad health all his adult life...But I know this, in his suffering, and with God's help, he's brought forth the sweetest, most loving family I've ever known. Would their family bond have been as strong if Marty had had good health? IDK. Maybe, maybe not? Maybe it was the uncertainty and appreciation for every day God blessed them with, that kept them loving one another and close to one another.

What I do know is, that God is the GARDENER, not me. He knows best how to water, prune, and care for His vineyard.

**PRUNING isn't PLEASANT, but at least it has a PURPOSE!**

God knows it's not enough that we just make it through a season in our life, we need to get something out of every season of our lives. I don't just want to make it through, I **WANT TO GET SOMETHING OUT OF MY LIFE!**

How do we do that? **JUST REMAIN!**

**III) The Proof:** v 8 "What brings glory to my Father is this, that you bear an abundance of fruit. Do that, and you will be my disciples." Do that, and people will know you belong to me.

God intends for our life to be lived for Him. And that's only natural. Our life can't exist without Him. He's the vine! And if we draw our life from Him, we should live our life for Him. That means that when things are hard, we just remain. We don't bail when things get bad. And we don't bail when things are going okay. Our life is to remain in Him.

**ILLUS:** life of Job "When I come out of this fire, I'll come out as pure gold" God knew that Job was someone that could prove His point

**CONCLUSION:** What is your plan for 2020? Where does God fit in your plans? Why don't we set our minds on things of God and be the people He's called us to be?