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Series: Power of Moments

Title: The Renovation Process

Text: John 15:1-8, Gal 5:22; John 15:12,17; Phil 4:11; Matt 3:8; Job 42:5; Heb 12:6; John 15:11

Do you have a vision for your life? Where do you see yourself in one year? Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? Twenty years? What do you see for your life in your last days? In order to get to that place, a renovation must begin. It requires us to take a deep look at our current reality and determine what needs to change to arrive at that place.

I am sure if we sat here long enough, we could all come up with a lot of things we want for our lives and what needs to change to arrive there. However, this morning, I want to show you God's vision for your life and the process by which He takes your house, so to speak, and makes it His home.

Let's begin in John 15:1. *"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. 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, 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."*

This might surprise you, but in this passage, Jesus uses garden imagery to lay out God's vision for our life. Did you catch it? His vision is for our lives to be fruitful. In v. 4, He says His desire is that His followers would bear fruit. In v. 2, Jesus says that His Father does a work in His followers' lives so that they may bear more fruit. In other words, both Jesus and the Father have a desire that we would not just bear fruit but that we would be producing more fruit. Jesus says the same thing in v. 5, that we would continue to bear more fruit. Finally, in verse 8, Jesus says that the Father is glorified when we bear fruit, but even more, our fruit is the mark, so to speak, of our followership. Our fruit proves whether or not we are His followers.

To cast a vision is to help people see what they cannot. Here, Jesus is helping us see what we cannot through the metaphor of a garden. Jesus sees a garden filled with His followers who are always in bloom as they receive their nutrients from Him as the Father walks through the garden lovingly pruning the branches so that they may grow and produce more and more fruit.

Being that it is such a big deal, what exactly does Jesus mean by "bearing fruit?"

Keeping in step with the garden metaphor, bearing fruit is *the reproduction of the life of the vine in the branch*. Practically, to bear fruit is Jesus growing in and producing His life and character through us. *Bearing fruit is the process of the Father and the Son taking up residence in our house and making it Their home so that when people drive by our house, they see Jesus' home*. They see a healthy tree that continues to grow and produce more of what Paul describes in Galatians 5:22: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

We may have a big vision for our life, but hear me very clearly: *God's vision for our life is not what we have or don't have but that we would look more and more like Jesus* - that our house would look more and more like His home.

I want you to notice something about these character traits. Ever notice that they are *primarily relational*? Listen, if you want to know if your life is bearing fruit, I recommend taking a hard look at your relationships – and I don't just mean the easy ones but also the difficult ones.

I think that is why Jesus concludes His thought about bearing fruit in (John 15) v. 12 and 17 by reiterating the following command: *"Love one another, as I have loved you."* *Our relationships reveal our fruit; God is glorified by the fruit we bear, and the fruit we bear proves whether we really have the Spirit and if we are His followers.*

Let's talk about how this happens – how do we bear fruit? In just 11 verses, Jesus uses the word "abide" ten times. This is to overemphasize that we bear fruit as we abide in Him. To abide means to "remain." Look closely at what Jesus says in (John 15) v. 4, *"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."*

You don't have to be a gardener or an arborist to know that a branch cannot bear fruit apart from its root system. If the branch is cut off from the nutrients that come up from the roots, it will eventually die. To abide in Jesus is to remain in relationship to Him so we derive the nutrients we need from Him as our root system.

Here is the trouble with this: Look quickly at what Jesus says in (John 15) v. 1, *"I am the true vine..."* This indicates that there are plenty of "false vines" that compete for our attention, promising to satisfy our souls; but there is only One who can – Jesus. He is the only true vine who carries the nutrients we need to satisfy our souls and produce fruit in our lives.

To receive nutrients from Him means that we live in fluid relationship with Him. I use the word fluid because for a branch to receive nutrients, it must have a clear path, or conduit, from the root system to the branch. *This kind of relationship requires time, proximity, communication, and maintenance with the root system to grow and be healthy.*

Historically, we have recognized this work as the spiritual disciplines – Bible reading, prayer, worship, fellowship, fasting, journaling, silence, and solitude as a means to get our nutrients from Him; but this can be tricky. While the spiritual disciplines are a means to grow a relationship with the Lord, they are a means to an end, not an end in and of themselves. If we are not careful, we can confuse the means with the end and go to church, attend Bible study, sing some songs, etc., and yet be withering on the vine and producing little to no fruit. In fact, churches are filled with these people.

What is important is that, as His followers, we recognize that, like any healthy relationship, to “remain” in *relationship with Him requires that we carve our time for Him, we live in proximity to Him, we communicate with Him, and we have regular “check-ins” to ensure everything is good.*

If we are unwilling or lack *any* desire to the hard work of living in relationship to Jesus, it may reveal something deeper is going on. In (John 15) v. 6, Jesus says, *“Anyone who does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into a fire, and burned.”* It seems that if we are unwilling or lack *any* desire to live in relationship with Jesus, we may be a branch, but we are one that is cut off from the vine or was never connected in the first place.

Which is the reason Jesus places so much attention on the fruit of the branch. The distinguishing mark of a genuine relationship with Him is not the system itself but the outcome – *a life growing in joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in relationship to the people around us.*

A life lived in relationship with Jesus produces the fruit of His character through us. But notice, God’s vision for us is not that we would just bear fruit, but that *we would bear more fruit.*

This is where the renovation process begins to really come together as God steps in and begins pruning us so that we can continue to grow and bear more fruit. On one end, part of this process is, as we looked at a minute ago, God taking branches that do not bear fruit and separating them from those that do. On the other end, God is taking branches that do bear fruit and pruning them so they bear more fruit. To the branches bearing good fruit, God loves you far too much to allow you to stay as you are.

To “prune” is to “clean up” or “re-organize” for greater growth. I want us to think about it in three ways: *crowding, crossing, and competing.* Sometimes, a plant can have so many branches that are crowding each other and hindering its growth. Other times, branches overlap and rub one another; that causes wounds and leaves the branch open for disease. Sometimes, a plant can have branches that are all growing in the same direction at the same speed and are vying

for dominance from the root system. Either way, the gardener has the responsibility to prune the crowding, crossing, and competing branches so that the plant grows and thrives.

Follow me here. In the cool of the day, God the Father carefully walks through the garden of our lives and begins to lovingly prune healthy and unhealthy things so that we will continue to grow and produce more fruit. This means that God may send or allow things in our lives that will remove the crowded, crossed, or competing branches around us that hinder our growth.

Let's break that down a bit further. We all have things that crowd our lives and distract us from our relationship with Jesus. Whether it be busyness, relationships, technology, general worries, or cares of the world - whatever it may be - a good Gardener of our souls is going to prune us to free us of these things, calling us to lean into Him, trust Him deeper, or focus our attention back on Him. I think of Paul when he wrote in Philippians 4:11, *"For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me."* Here, Paul is expressing his experience through divine pruning. He learned contentment through having plenty and in hunger and finding God to sustain Him through it. Keep in mind this pruning isn't always because you have done something to deserve it. Paul is the greatest missionary who ever lived, and he was snake bitten, shipwrecked, and inconvenienced, all so that God could take a good thing and make it a great thing. A rose petal is clipped so that a new rose can bloom.

In addition, we all have sin in our lives that is diametrically crossed with God's desire for us. If we are not careful to attend to this sin, it will create wounds that will allow disease to enter in and affect our lives in a greater way. When we receive Jesus as Lord, His *Holy* Spirit moves into our *unholy* home, which means these two spirits are directly opposed to one another. Paul talks about this war of the spirit in Romans 7 and also in Galatians 5. So, when the perfect Spirit of God moves into our imperfect house, He begins rearranging things, and it is often a difficult and painful process. Our sinful desires are confronted, control stretched, authority challenged, because a superior Authority has moved in. Confronting Paul's pride, in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul refers back to God sending or allowing an unknown "thorn in the flesh" to confront his pride and keep him humble and dependent on God. According to His love, God will send or allow things into our lives to directly expose or address sin that is causing disease to spread or holding us back from bearing more fruit. Jesus said in Matthew 3:8, *"Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."* God's process for healing is for Him to expose sin, we repent of it, and we are restored to new life and more growth.

Finally, there are things in our lives that compete for our affections and tempt us to run to them for nutrients. Knowing they can never produce what they promise to offer, God lovingly sends things or allows things into our lives to clip those competing idols so we can continue to grow. Take Job, for example. He was a righteous man. Yet, God took away everything so that at the end of his life he could say, *"I heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees*

you (Job 42:5): While outsiders looking in may think, "Wow, how unjust of God to allow all these things." But to Job, at the end of his life, he never questions God but only worships Him. God clipped the loves of his life so that he would love Him still.

While this pruning is painful, it is important to know that the pruning is always in the steady hands and control of the Gardener who we know to be the standard of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I find comfort in the truth from Hebrews 12:6: *"The Lord disciplines the one he loves."* He loves me far too much to allow me to stay as I am. He loves you far too much to allow you to stay where you are.

Referring to all of this, Jesus concludes in John 15:11, *"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

God's vision is that we would be full of joy as we glorify Him by producing fruit, living in relationship to Him as He prunes us to help us grow and bear more fruit. This is the renovation process.