Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

If you were able to talk to a new Christian about your experience of the Christian life, what would you say? What nuggets of truth would you share with them that might help them as they begin their faith journey?

Well, in John 15 Jesus is preparing His disciples for the fact that He will soon be leaving them. Judas has just left them to prepare to betray Jesus so Jesus takes this last opportunity to warn His disciples not to be like Judas who rejected Jesus but instead to abide in Him or remain in Him. And He does this with vine imagery. So we have seen that:

* Jesus is the vine and the Father is the vinedresser. We saw that the fruit is good works or obedience to the commands of God. We saw that branches are people who claim to have a connection with the Lord Jesus, but some do *not* produce fruit and are taken away, while others *do* produce fruit. And we saw that the secret of fruitfulness is abiding in Jesus, which means having an interior spiritual life with Him.

But before we move on to the next section of ch. 15, there are **a few more pearls of wisdom from this vine image** that we have not really touched on yet. And they would be ideal thoughts to share with a new Christian. In fact, they will be a really useful reminder for all of us, even if we have walked with the Lord for many years. They are that **we *will* be pruned**, **we *need* His Word**, and **we *are* His friends**.

1. Let’s take each of these in turn, noting, first of all, that **we will be pruned**. And we see this in v2 where we read, “… *every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit*.”
   1. Here’s a question for you: Do people typically have a vine because they like the shape of the branches or the leaves? No. They have a vine because they want grapes! And similarly, God expects us to produce fruit.
      1. And fruit, as we have seen, is doing good works or obeying God’s commandments.
         1. Earlier we read from **Colossians 1**. And Paul’s prayer for believers is that “*[we] walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work*.”
         2. Boy and girls, I am going to give you a list and then I want you to tell us what the list is. Here is the list – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. What is that list? **The fruit of the Spirit**. Anyone who has the Holy Spirit living within them will produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
         3. So God expects the fruit of good works from His children.
      2. But it is also clear from this vine image that God expects ***growth*** in fruitfulness. V2 – “*and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit*.” v5 – “*Whoever abides in me and I in Him, he it is that bears much fruit*.” v8 – “*By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit*.”
         1. So just as an infant learns to roll over and then crawl and then stand and then take a first step and one day walk and run, so the Christian life is to progress from the baby steps of obedience to giant strides of obedience. Our capacity for love and patience and kindness, etc, may be small at first, but as Spirit-filled believers we will grow in love and patience and kindness, etc.
   2. And the image of how the Father brings about this growth in His children is **pruning**.
      1. If you have ever had a vine or a fruit tree you will know that the fruit comes from the buds on the branches. And while you would think that more buds equals more fruit, you actually get *more* fruit and *better quality* fruit from branches with just a few buds. And this is because, after pruning, the buds that are left can hardly contain all the nutrients from the vine, and they burst forth with luscious clusters of grapes. So you end up with an increase both of quality and quantity of fruit.
      2. But boys and girls, pruning is done with a very sharp pair of secateurs or loppers and cutting off the ends of the branches. And if branches had feelings and could talk, what do you think they would say during pruning? Ouch! That hurts! Stop it! Leave me alone!
      3. So the advice for new Christians is that the Christian life will include the pain of being pruned by the Father so that we produce more fruit.
      4. And this is plainly stated in **Hebrews 12**. “*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons … Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them … For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*.”
      5. So just as it sometimes takes a sore backside for us to learn obedience and honesty and respect, etc, it often takes the painful discipline of our heavenly Father for us to become more humble and pure and patient and selfless, etc.
      6. And we see this, time and again, in the Bible. You see, the human beings in the Bible are sinful ratbags, just like you and me. Take King David as an example. He committed the sins of adultery and murder. And because of who he was and various other family circumstances, as a consequence of his sin, his newborn son died, his daughter was raped by her half-brother, and one of David’s sons tried to seize the throne from David. It was an awfully painful time for David and his family. Do you think he would have chosen any of this? Not at all! But read Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 and look what David learned from the painful discipline of the Lord.
      7. And I am sure that every mature believer here, if he or she could talk with a new believer, would testify, often with tears, to this truth – having our sins and bad habits, and their consequences, exposed by the Lord was very painful and embarrassing. And at the time we probably cried out and begged the Lord to leave us alone. There is no way we would have chosen to go through what we went through. But now we can look back and see that the Father was at work to train us. And we love Him even more as a result. And we are more useful to Him and to others who may be in need of our testimony because they are in a similar situation to what we were once in.
      8. So imaging our conversation with a new believer, we will say that the hard and painful experiences of life are times of pruning. They are our Father in heaven using all sorts of circumstances to deal with our bad habits and sins so that we draw closer to Him in faith and we grow in the fruit of obedience.
2. So one of the extra pearls of wisdom from this vine image that new believers and all of us need to know is that **we *will* be pruned**. But another powerful and precious truth is that **we *need* His Word**. And this comes from v7 where we read, “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*.” So what does it mean that the word of Jesus would abide in us?
   1. Well, it will be helpful to note here that the powerful and precious truthes we are looking at today are not three entirely separate things. In fact, they are very connected and they are common to every believer. And so, every mature believer here who has experienced the pruning of the Father will testify that God’s word played a vital role in the whole process. **Hebrews 4:12** says, “*The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart*.” So together with whatever circumstances we encounter, it will always be His word that pierces our conscience and reveals our sin, and directs us to Christ in confession and repentance. **But if we take the letters ‘i’ and ‘n’ out of discipline, what are we left with? ‘Disciple.’** So while God disciplines us with His Word in times of trial, He is always discipling us with His word. Our growth in fruitfulness comes from the reading and preaching of His word.
      1. We saw this in our earlier reading from **Psalm 1**: The blessed man’s “*delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season*.” So fruitfulness is a result of Bible intake. As we read the Bible and hear it preached, the Holy Spirit will use it to produce love and joy and patience and gentleness in us.
      2. And here is a question for you: Would you like to know how to avoid sin? Well, the Bible actually tells us how we can avoid sin. **Psalm 119:11** says, “*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you*.” So what do you think storing God’s word in your heart means? I can give you a clue. It starts with the letter ‘M’ and it rhymes with bemorization. That’s right, memorization. To store up God’s word in your heart is to memorize Scripture.
         1. Pastor John Piper one preached about the benefits of memorizing Scripture. He listed 8 benefits:
            1. Memorizing Scripture makes meditation possible at times when I can’t be reading the Bible, and meditation is the pathway of deeper understanding.
            2. Memorizing Scripture strengthens my faith because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, and that happens when I am hearing the word in my head.
            3. Memorizing Scripture shapes the way I view the world by conforming my mind to God’s viewpoint.
            4. Memorizing Scripture makes God’s word more readily accessible for overcoming temptation to sin, because God’s warnings and promises are the way we conquer the deceitful promises of sin.
            5. Memorizing Scripture guards my mind by making it easier to detect error — and the world is filled with error, since the god of this world is a liar.
            6. Memorizing Scripture enables me to hit the devil in the face with a force he cannot resist, and so protect myself and my family from his assaults.
            7. Memorizing Scripture provides the strongest and sweetest words for ministering to others in need.
            8. Memorizing Scripture provides the matrix for fellowship with Jesus because He talks to me through His word, and I talk to Him in prayer.
         2. Now, benefit number seven is that memorizing Scripture provides the strongest and sweetest words for ministering to others in need. We talked about an example of this two Saturdays ago at our men’s breakfast. We are working through a book about being godly men called ‘*The Masculine Mandate*.’ And the chapter we were looking at is about our duties as husbands to nourish and cherish our wives, just as Christ does the church. So how does Christ nourish and cherish the church? Through the preaching of the Word. Therefore, a very important way that we husbands nourish and cherish our wives is with God’s word. The author said,

*When a husband knows his wife is weighed down under the burdens of child-raising, he might say to her, ‘*Cast all your anxieties on [the Lord], because He cares for you*’ (1 Peter 5:7). A husband who knows his wife feels unlovely or depressed can minister the balm of God’s word to the bruised spot on her heart: ‘*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing’ *(Zeph. 3:17). The husband who knows his wife is grieving a loss might encourage her to take her heart to the Lord: ‘*The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit*.’ (Psa. 34:18). The point is not that a husband is to drop stock Bible lines into his wife’s head, but that he is sensitively and caringly seeking to apply [the only thing that can truly nourish her soul – God’s word] to encourage, strengthen, instruct, and exhort her in the truth and grace of the Lord. Many husbands will reply, ‘I am not sure I know the Bible well enough to minister to my wife’s needs in that way.’ That is precisely God’s point: in obedience to Him, God wants us to be motivated by our love for our wives and their need of our ministry to become the men of faith and biblical knowledge we are intended to be.*

* + - 1. And this applies to *all* of us in *all* of our relationships. **We will nourish each other best when we speak God’s word to one another**. And brothers and sisters, this really is a matter of application. We memorize song lyrics, we memorize sports or technical terminology, we memorize jokes, we memorize names, we memorize passwords, we memorize recipes, we memorize lines and scenes from movies. And if for some reason we just cannot memorize things, we write them down in a notebook because they are important to us. Well, we can do that with Scripture too.
    1. So it will be really helpful for us to tell a new believer that we need God’s word. But of course, it is not enough just to say this; we have to set an example from them by attending both worship services and a regular Bible study, and by doing our own daily personal devotions.

1. So we will be pruned and we need God’s Word. And that brings us to the next powerful and precious truth from this vine image, which is that **we are Jesus’ friends**! And we see this in vv13-16 where we read, “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you*.”
   1. I don’t know about you, but my reaction to these words is Wow! Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords and the King of kings, calls me His friend! I am the friend of the Lord of creation! And I am not His friend because I chose Him but because He chose me! Double Wow!
   2. And in v13 Jesus speaks about a person’s willingness to lay down his life for his friend as the greatest love. On Feb. 6, 2018, **Anthony** Perez and his friend, **Juan** Umpierrez, left school in New York and went to play in the park on the way home. They were fooling around near an ice covered pond when the ice broke and Juan slipped down into the freezing water. Well Anthony ran to the edge and began pulling his friend out. But as he dragged Juan out, he fell in also and Juan was now too weak to help Anthony and Anthony was too weak to pull himself out and so Anthony drowned because trying to save his friend. It’s a sad and beautiful tale all at the same time! But nothing compares to what Jesus sacrificed for us.
      1. You see, Jesus did not have to die. We have to die because we are fallen sinners and the wages of sin is death. But Jesus never sinned. Yet He chose to die for us.
      2. And Anthony did not know that he would die that day. But Jesus knew that he would die on the cross His whole life long.
      3. And while Anthony died for his good friend, Juan, **Romans 5:8** says, “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.” Jesus did not die for us because we were His friends, He died to make us His friends! Triple wow!
   3. So we will end our time together today with two questions:
      1. First, do you know Jesus as the One who demonstrated His love and friendship for you by dying like this? Do you understand and are you so grateful that He *chose* to die for you, that He *lived* *His whole life knowing that He would die for you*, that He died for you when you were still His enemy, and that He endured spiritual death so that you do not have to? If so, then let that be heard in how you sing the hymn we will sing in a moment: **What a friend we have in Jesus**!
      2. But the second question is this: Is Jesus your friend? And no, this is not the same question that I just asked you. What I mean by asking this question is what v14 is all about. For there Jesus says, “*You are my friends if you do what I command you*.”
         1. One contemporary speaker I enjoy listening to is **Jordan Peterson**. He is a critic of a lot of modern thinking that influences universities and politics and the media. He does not profess faith in God and he is often asked about this. He says to claim belief in God requires that person to live the maximum goodness possible. And by his observation, many who claim belief in God don’t seem very concerned with truth and purity and kindness and self control. Isn’t that sad. So Jordan Peterson says that he tries to live as though God exists.
         2. Now, I would really like to talk to JP about the gospel. But I think his main point is valid. You cannot get all warm and fuzzy about having Jesus as your friend if you are not passionate about obeying His commandments. That’s what He says here: “*You are my friends if you do what I command you*.” Does that sound like you? Does the triple wow of everything Jesus has done to make you His friend motivate you and spur you on to do good works? May it be so for us all!

So the three pearls of wisdom that we could share with a new believer are that we will be pruned, we need God’s Word, and we are Jesus’ friends. But they are not just important truthes for new believers; they are the message of the gospel that we all need to hear again and again and again. Amen.