

1/11/2015

ESF Lord's day message

How To Live a Fruitful Life

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will 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. ⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples

In this word, Jesus compares a man's life to a life of a vine branch. And He compares God to a gardener who makes branches of a vine fruitful. Then Jesus claims that He is the true vine who is the source of life for all branches.

Fruit in life means good and righteous words, attitudes, deeds and characters (Gal 5:22-23) through which man can glorify God, and which can make a person honorable and happy.

It also means good results in witnessing. It means people who are led by a believer to Christ's salvation.

There are two main conditions which make a man's life fruitful. First, there is cutting and pruning of one's life. Second, one's life should remain in Jesus. We will learn the first today.

One of the keys to making a fruitful tree is regularly and thoroughly cutting and pruning the branches of the tree. In Hampton Court near London, there is a grapevine under glass. It is 246 years old (planted in 1769), and has but one root which is at least two feet thick. Some of the branches are 200 feet long. Because of skillful cutting and pruning, the vine still produces hundreds of pounds of grapes each year.

Jesus says that to make a man's life fruitful, there are things that must be cut off and pruned. Jesus says in verse 2: *He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*

Cutting off

There are many different branches on one vine. Not all branches on a vine are necessary to bear fruit. There are some dead branches. Insects and worms are living in those branches. The dead branches block sunlight from live branches and keep the live branches from growing. There are also fruitless branches for various reasons. Although they are alive, they just suck nutrition from the tree without producing fruit. Those branches prevent other healthy and productive branches from growing well and producing much and good fruit. So to make the vine fruitful, farmers must cut off such bad or unnecessary branches every year. If they cut off such branches thoroughly, they can make a tree healthy and fruitful.

Likewise, a man's life has obstacles which prevent his life from being productive. There are bad habits and sinful characters in our lives which keep us from being better and being productive.

Those things must be cut off from our lives. When something in our lives is cut off, it is painful. Some of them have been in our lives for so long that they may have become part of our lives. We feel comfortable with them although we may know that they are not good for us. We may have the habit of gossiping about others. We may have a quick temper.

Some of us may have a secret addiction to a certain harmful practice. Without them we feel empty. So we may be reluctant to cut them off from our lives. Some times we try to cut out those habits or addictions from our lives, but are unsuccessful.

But the unfruitful branches must be cut off for the healthy fruitful branches. Jesus does not say that we have the power to cut them off. The job of “cutting off” is done by the gardener, God Himself. It is God who cuts them off. If we try to cut off bad behavior by our own effort, it will lead us to self-righteousness. When the bad practices seem to be cut off, we will think we have made ourselves better. But the bad behavior will never completely be cut off. They will come back. And we will get disappointed.

It is God who can take out corrupt, sick, and dead parts from our lives. God does that without discouraging or hurting the healthy parts in our lives.

While God is cutting off sinful, dead branches in our lives, there will be some pain. There is no such thing as painless cutting.

If we continue sinning without repentance and that sin is destroying us, God may expose the sin to the public, so that we may be put into painful shame publicly. If you are lazy and making excuses for your laziness, He may allow you to be fired from your job and let you go through troubles until you repent from your sin of laziness.

If you are proud and continue hurting people around you with your pride, God will put you down in front people and he may let you be humiliated painfully. If you disobey God’s word of forgiving your enemies and you hate your enemies, God may take peace away from your heart and let you live in turmoil.

But the pain is necessary. We have to believe in God’s good will and purpose for our lives through the pain. When someone has an addiction

to alcohol or drugs, while God is cutting the person off the drugs or alcohol, there may be enormous pain. What we must do is surrender to God when He cuts off the bad and sinful branches from our lives. Jesus says in Matthew 5:29-30, *If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

When David committed the sin of adultery, God sent him the prophet Nathan, and exposed his hidden sin. It was shameful and painful for David to admit the sin. But when David surrendered to God and admitting his sin, God forgave him and helped him to be more mature. When you remain in hidden sin, your life cannot be productive. When God loves you, He deals with your hidden sin. He encourages you to cut the sin out from you. What you have to do is to admit your sin and receive God's forgiveness.

Moses had a quick temper. Because of his quick temper, he killed a person. He sinned. Soon, his sin was exposed by his own people and he had to run away into the desert and stay there for 40 years. It was really painful for Moses to become a fugitive in the desert and live as a poor shepherd for so many years. But God cut out the quick temper and made him a gentle person. Only then was he able to be used by God in a mighty way.

There is no short cut. There is no exception. If God wants to use you in a precious way, if God wants to use you in a mighty way, he will certainly deal with your hidden sin or bad habit. When he deals with your sin or bad habit, surrender yourself to him although it is painful. Be thankful to him for making your life more fruitful.

Pruning

There are branches which produce good fruit and have a potential to produce more and better fruit. There are some weak branches which cannot bear good fruit but has potential to produce good fruit. Those branches should not be cut off but must be pruned so that they become stronger and healthier and produce better and more fruit.

Likewise, God prunes something good in our lives to make us more mature and healthier.

The word “prunes” in the original Greek text is “KATHAIRO (Kaa-thy-row)”. The word basically means to “cleanses” or “make clean”, “purify”. The tense of this word is a Present, Active, and Indicative. The tense describes that purifying is not a past action but an action that is present and will continue. God is pruning us not only presently but also will keep pruning us. Pruning is an ongoing action by God on our lives

How does God prune us? God prunes (purifies) us through disciplines. Through disciplines, God molds our good characters to be better, and strengthen our weak faith. 1 Peter 1:6-7, *...though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

In the refiner’s fire, gold is melted down under intense heat and all the impurities that float to the top are scraped off in order to produce a pure gold.

God uses many different ways, like a refiner’s fire to discipline our character and faith to be more mature and pure. To discipline our character and faith, He may use people around us, difficult circumstances, financial pressure, our failures, illnesses, or trials. You may get sick and suffer from the sickness although it is not caused by your mistakes or sins. You may lose your job and suffer from the job loss not because you have done anything wrong, but because your company was closed down. You may be misunderstood seriously by

other people who unfairly and mercilessly judge or accuse you of something you have done or spoken, or of your attitude. It is painful to be misunderstood, or to be judged or accused unfairly and mercilessly.

God uses the pain and circumstances to refine us. God disciplines every believer. The reason God disciplines us is because we are branches of His vine and He is the Gardener. He wants to make our lives more fruitful. Through God's discipline, we become stronger, healthier branches of the vine. Through His discipline, our faith grows, our character become more mature.

Then how should we respond to God's discipline?

1). We have to be thankful for all discipline because God confirms His love for us through discipline. Hebrews 12:6 says, *because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.* Also Hebrews 12:8 says, *If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.*

So when we are going through painful discipline, we must praise God for His good will for us in the discipline: "God I thank you for purifying my heart, molding my character to be better and more mature through this discipline." "Lord, thank you for helping me to understand the meaning of your cross by this discipline not through my head but through my heart." "Father, thank you for confirming me by this painful discipline that you love me as your legitimate child."

2) We have to endure when discipline comes to us.

Hebrews 12:7-12 says, *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

When you are falsely accused, unfairly judged by some people do not quickly retaliate. Try to forgive them or wait for God's intervention.

When you go through painful trials while you are doing something good, do not give up on doing it. Endure the trials and continue doing it. Then God will surely make your life fruitful.