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ESF Lord's Day message

How To Live a Fruitful Life (I)

John 15:1-2

"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.

There is a story of a little boy who used to escape from his bedroom after being punished. He would crawl out of his bedroom window down an old fruit tree to the ground. The tree became like a friend to him. One day, his father told him that he was going to chop down the fruit tree, because it hadn't borne any fruit for a number of years.

The boy didn't want to see the tree cut down. That evening, the boy and his friend bought a bushel of apples, and during the night, tied those apples on the barren branches. The next morning, the man could not believe his eyes. He said to his wife, "Honey, I just can't believe it! That old tree hasn't yielded any fruit for years, and now it's covered with apples. And the most amazing thing is that it's a pear tree!"

In this word, Jesus compares a man's life to a life of a branch of a vine. 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. This vine has the power to produce fruit through its branches. This vine will never wither or die. As long as the branches are connected and remain in the vine, they will keep producing fruit.

Fruit in life means good and righteous words, attitudes, deeds and a character such as love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23) through which man can glorify God and become honorable and happy. It also means good results in witnessing; people being 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 256 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.

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 more 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. It prevents us from making good and productive relationship with other people. We may have bad habits which constantly pull us down and make us dysfunctional. Some of us may have a secret addiction to something harmful. It robs us of freedom and depresses us.

Sometimes we try to cut out those attitudes, habits or addictions from our lives. When they seem to be cut off, we will think we have made ourselves better. But they will never completely be cut off by our own efforts. They will come back. And we will get disappointed.

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. 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. 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.

But the pain is necessary. We have to believe in God’s good will and purpose for our lives through the 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.*

One day David committed the sin of adultery with a married woman and the woman got pregnant. David killed the woman's husband to hide the sin. He thought he could hide the sin forever. But God sent him the prophet Nathan and exposed his hidden sin. God also let the baby boy who was born by the adultery die. It was shameful and painful for David to admit the sin and see the son dying. But when David surrendered to God and admitting his sin, God forgave him and bless him with another son, Solomon who succeeded David in his kingship.

Moses had a quick temper. Because of his quick temper, he killed an Egyptian man. 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 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.

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 must do is to surrender to God and admit your sin before God.

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 bad attitude, habit, character, and hidden sin. When he deals with them, surrender yourself to him although it is painful. Be thankful to him for making your life more fruitful. Pain will pass sooner

or later. You will see positive improvement and change in your charter and life.

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 continuously. Pruning is an ongoing action by God on our lives

How does God prune us? God prunes (purifies) us through discipline. Through discipline, God molds our good character to be better and strengthens 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 float to the top. They are scraped off to produce pure gold.

God uses many ways to discipline our character and faith to be more mature and purer. 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 a job loss not because you have done anything wrong, but because your company was closed. You may be misunderstood seriously by other people who unfairly judge or accuse you of something you have done or said. It is painful to be misunderstood, or to be judged or accused unfairly.

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 the 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.*

Elbert Hubbard said, "God will not look you over for medals, degrees, or diplomas, but for scars." Through scars from God's discipline, our character will become maturer and stronger. Through the scars of God's discipline, we will become a person God can use. Through the scars of God's discipline our lives will become fruitful.

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 understand the meaning of your cross by this discipline not through my head but through my heart." "Father, thank you for convincing 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. Take them as God's good disciplines. Endure the trials and continue doing it.

Some years ago, during a Monday night football game between the Chicago Bears and the New York Giants, one of the announcers observed that Walter Payton, the Bears' running back, had accumulated over nine miles in career rushing yardage. The other announcer remarked, "Yeah, and that's with somebody knocking him down every 4.6 yards!" Walter Payton, the most successful running back ever, knows that everyone even the very best gets knocked down. The key to success was to get up and run again just as hard.

An old seaman once said, "During the fiercest storms the only way a ship can survive is to keep its nose pointed straight into the wind. If you try to turn to the left or the right, the ship may capsize. If you try to run from the wind, the waves can surge over the stern."

That's good advice for us. Whenever you're in a storm, don't turn away from God. Don't run away from Him. Instead, turn straight toward Him and seek His face. When you're in the sunshine, you MAY have faith, but when you're in the storm you MUST have faith.

If you keep enduring trials with faith in God's discipline, God will surely make you stronger and mature through the trials and make your life more fruitful.