

Growing Your Faith in Tough Seasons (Growing in Isolation Week 1)

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Date: 25 March 2020

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[0 : 00] Hey, what's up guys? Donnie here. This is just more of our effort as a church to try to help you in this season of social distancing to keep growing in your relationship with God, to keep growing in your relationship with others, and to keep helping you know how to be a blessing to our community through all this. So this video is not designed for your own personal consumption.

This is meant to be shared. It's meant to be shared with others. It may be that you watch this and your community group does a Zoom call together, or you and the folks that you're staying with at your home talk about this together, but you can't just consume this all by yourself. You need to share it.

We need to do life with other people. I was reminded by someone who I follow on Twitter who's a single lady, and she was saying how this whole moment has really, it's stripped away all of her illusions of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and it's forced her to have to really fight for friendship. And I just thought that was so beautiful, and I think that's the moment we're in.

So that's what this video is for. So the topic for this one is how do we grow spiritually in really hard seasons? Jesus would often use language that was agricultural when he talked about growth, and so I'm going to read you just one of those really, probably the most famous passage on that in John 15 verses 1 through 17. Jesus says, 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, so that it may bear more fruit.

Already you are clean because of the word I've spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you, and as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. I'm the vine, and 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, probably picking up the theme here, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples, which is just a word that means follower of Jesus. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

[2 : 37] These things I have spoken to you that you may have joy, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends. You are my friends, Jesus says, if you do what I've commanded you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master's doing, but I've 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 will give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another. So, the basics of this are, Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and God the Father here is this heavenly vine dresser.

The branches were there to produce fruit, to produce a lot of fruit, and that feels pretty straightforward until you actually try to apply this and live it out. And so, I want to just help us to see some of the things here that maybe aren't immediately obvious for us. I'm going to give us three things we should know, and I'm going to give us five things that we should allow for in this season. So, firstly, we should know that harsh climates make for amazing fruit. I don't know if you know this or not, but a fire or a drought or rocky soil, all of that doesn't feel like it would be good for a vine, but

it's actually incredible, because it causes the vine to struggle, and that struggle is what makes for amazing fruits, what makes for amazing wine. And so, while we would rather have a really perfect climate all the time, it makes for boring fruit. It makes for kind of vanilla wine.

And right now, we're in a harsh climate. The sources of comfort and provision have all been threatened, and they're drying up. And this, if we'll allow it, this will force us to struggle through, and that fruit will be better as a result of it. So, that's the first thing we should know.

The second thing we should know is that pruning, it makes for a healthier plant, but it's painful. You kind of even read right over that, like, oh, he prunes us great, but like, think about what that is.

[4 : 48] You know, the idea of bearing more fruit is really attractive, but the process to get there is not so attractive. It's not so appealing. And all of us are getting pruned in this season. We're getting cut. Things are getting, you know, trimmed and adjusted, and it's a painful process, but it's for our good. The third thing we should know that's not really so obvious is that it's harder than it looks to be a good branch. It doesn't feel that hard, but man, it's actually really tough. I don't know if you've ever tried to pick a splinter out of a little kid's foot, you know, but the sort of straightforward logic of, please lay there still while I take this sharp object to your foot doesn't really translate, right? And in the same way, I think we struggle to be a good branch. It's hard just to lay there and just trust. It's hard to do that. Also, it feels kind of passive to be the branch.

It feels like we want to do something more than just abide. You know, we want something we can sink our teeth into. If we're honest, we'd probably all rather be the vine dresser, and we can run around, and we could, you know, prune everybody else's life, but that's not what we are. We're just the branch.

But that doesn't mean we can't do anything. Here's five things that we should be allowing for as good branches in this season. First, allow this to grow your faith. You know, you are in the hands of a loving vine dresser, your heavenly father. Allow it to grow your faith in him. You know, you need to be able to trust him. Like you would go into a surgery, you have to trust the surgeon that he's, you know, he's going to cut you. It's going to be hard. It's going to be painful, but it's for your good. Allow this to grow your faith. That's what it's doing for me. I had a lot of plans for 2020 that are out the window, but I know that God's at work, and so it's growing my faith, and our faith muscles should be getting a lot bigger in this season. The second thing we can allow for is allow it to grow our humility, right? Jesus says that we can't do anything apart from him, and that's a humbling statement, but that's true. Allow it to grow your humility. I think this has the opportunity to help us grow a lot more dependent on Jesus. You know, the word abide, abide, abide, abide, abide, just keeps coming up, and I wonder if you've ever considered this, that it's kind of a clue because, you know, abide just means to remain, but the fact that we have to be told so many times to do it means that it's going to be hard to remain. It's going to be tempting to just turn tail and run. It's going to be tempting to want to take matters in your own hands and to separate yourself from Jesus, and Jesus tells us, don't do that. Abide in me. Remain in me.

Tarry with me is another way to say it, and he gives us that sobering fact because, man, apart from me, you can do nothing. Instantly, we wither up and die once we step away from the connection we have to Jesus. So allow it to grow your humility and your dependence as you stay connected to Jesus, this vine that we have. Thirdly, allow it to grow your confidence. God is committed to your good.

Jesus is not disconnected from us in hard times. He is the vine, and we are the branches. He is intimately connected to us no matter what it is we're going through. Also, man, the whole world might be turning upside down, but we are in the hands of our loving Father who is pruning us, and he's committed to our good. He's committed to our growth. He's committed to our health. So allow this to grow your confidence in God. You're not going to get a whole lot of confidence from social media or the news. Nobody really knows what's going on. Nobody knows how this is going to play out except for God, and so this should be a season where we grow in our confidence as we just trust that God is committed to our good, and Jesus is connected to us, and he's not going anywhere, and this is going to be okay. Fourthly, allow this to expose areas of sin in your life. Only Jesus is the true vine. He starts off by saying, I'm the true vine, which means that there are other vines that are false vines.

[8 : 53] They promise to give life. They promise to give help, but they can't deliver. They don't deliver, and I think in this season, we're all finding out things about ourselves that we trust in that we didn't know we trusted in. It might be, you know, your job, or it might be, you know, your finances, or

it might be relationships that we're, whatever it is, you and I are finding out things that, man, they kind of became divine for us, and so this is a chance to go actually only in Jesus do we find what we really need, and then lastly, allow this to grow your sacrificial love for others.

So Jesus kind of transitions from this whole vine language into something that feels kind of different, but it's not. It's not separate. He says, this is my commandment that you love one another as I've loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends, and he says in verse 17, these things I command you so that you will love one another, and the best fruit that we can bear is the fruit of sacrificial love for others that puts Jesus on display. Man, that is getting put to the test right now. You know, your sacrificial love for those people who you live with, I mean, that's tough when you're trapped in a house with them, right, for an indefinite period of time. You're having to fight for friendships when your regular rhythms are, you know, kind of gone, and that's putting our love for others to the test.

Social distancing is putting our love for others to the test, because essentially what we're doing is we're making a decision that impacts us for the benefit of others, and that's hard. In fact, we're seeing all kinds of people, you know, revolt against that and really exposing that we don't have the kind of love for others that we may have thought we did. So this should be a season through all these things, as we've looked at John 15, where you and I grow more and more, and the hope would be that we come out of this hard season tasting a whole lot better, a lot better fruit, because we've really grown through this hard time.

Thank you.