



## Going Deeper - Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide

### The Future of the Church: Recapturing the Heart of God in the People of God, for the Sake of the World

11/15/2020

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also 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." John 15: 1-4*

This week as we continued in our series on the future of the Church, we were reminded that the Church was created to be a living organism, not an institution. What a great season to be remembering the origin of our movement called "Christianity". During the fall, the trees, plants and bushes spend all of their energy producing seeds to be spread across the earth for reproducibility and then they hibernate to gain strength. Without this process, plants would cease to exist. In the early Church, we learn about how their numbers were growing exponentially each day. The fire and enthusiasm of those early believers was infectious. But somewhere along the way, organization of these growing groups of people turned into institutions and laws and oppression on some. In our generation, we see the struggle of the institutionalized church to reproduce. People don't want to be a part of an institution; they want to be a part of a movement of God.

The term "Christian" has become muddled in our current culture, hasn't it? People do heinous acts against God's creation in the name of Christianity. Reproducibility is not the only part of the Church that makes it a living organism; it also requires the production of fruit. Some Christian churches are producing bad fruit because they have not remained in the vine, as the Scripture above says. They have built their own vines out of their own gods. How do we know if we are producing good fruit? Jesus tells us the answer just moments after the above passage about the vine and the branches. He says, *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: **Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**"* (John 15: 10-13).

Jesus makes it simple. We remain in him by keeping his commands, and his command is that we love each other. Our fruit is shown by our love for others. If our actions, words, the way we spend our money, the way we interact with our co-workers, the way we treat the earth, the way we dedicate our time; if those things don't show love to others, then we are not in Jesus' vine. We will not reproduce good fruit.

#### **So consider...**

1. Where in the history of the Church have you seen bad fruit being produced? Where have you seen good fruit being produced?
2. Why do you think there have been periods of time in the life of the Church that have seen exponential growth? What are some similarities to those seasons?
3. What in your life needs to be pruned away that is not part of Jesus' vine and producing the fruit of love?

#### **Take Action:**

This week, I challenge you to ask Holy Spirit what needs to be pruned away from your life. It may be inconvenient and uncomfortable but all pruning is. The way we grow and learn sometimes hurts in the process. But the process of pruning away the bad will also provide an amazing weight lifted off your shoulders and offering you greater freedom. Take that action this week keeping in mind that pruning takes time and grace.

God bless - Sherri Walker