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Spring Cleaning

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Last week, we opened the drawer. We talked about taking spiritual inventory—allowing God to search us honestly, to look beneath the surface, to show us what’s really there. But if you’ve ever done spring cleaning, you know something: Opening the drawer is only step one.

Because once everything is spread out across the floor... now you have to decide:

What stays?

What goes?

What have I been holding onto that I don’t actually need anymore?

And honestly? That can be the harder part.

Mark hates when I spring clean. Because he knows exactly what’s coming.

I start pulling things out and asking questions like:

“When was the last time we used this?”

“Do we even need this anymore?”

“Why are we still keeping this?”

“Have we touched this since we moved here almost twenty years ago?”

And suddenly there are piles everywhere:

Keep.

Donate.

Throw away.

“I don’t know yet.”

And if we’re honest, spiritually, we do the exact same thing.

We hold onto things long after they’ve stopped giving life.

Traditions

Habits.

Busyness.

Noise.

Distractions.

Old hurts.

Bitterness.

Sometimes even good things that slowly crowd out the best thing: abiding in Christ.

The reality is: Jesus changed everything.

Today we read from John 15, verses 1-8. This passage brings a powerful message about the nature of discipleship, the right relationship with Christ, and the outcome of the Christian life.

Jesus talks about him being the vine, and his followers as the branches. Now, before we get into what Jesus is saying here, let’s stop and see what some of this would have meant before this, looking to the Old Testament. In the Old

Testament, the vine was often used as a symbol for Israel. We hear this in Psalm 80:8–9 “You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.” This imagery can be used as a symbol of a disobedient Israel that we can hear about in Ezekiel 15 and 17.

And the vine has become wild, as we hear in Jeremiah 2:21 “Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?” In the Old Testament, Israel is the vine or vineyard, and the Father is viewed as the gardener. But what’s different with how John puts it is that, while the Father is still portrayed as the gardener, Jesus is now the vine, not Israel, and the disciples or followers of Jesus are the branches. Jesus has been inserted into the image from the Old Testament, which changes it completely. The vine is no longer in danger of judgement, but Jesus, the Vine, stands in between the gardener and the branches as a mediator. Jesus changes everything because He becomes the place where life with God is found. The focus is no longer on a nation, a system, or human effort. The focus is now Christ Himself.

Before we get into these verses specifically let’s look around to see where John has placed this message. This passage opens up the second part of the Farewell

Discourse in the book of John. As one commentary puts it, “The Farewell Cycle, is presented in the form of a bull’s eye, with the message of the vine at the core.” That is, these words from Jesus are at the bull’s eye of His last words to His disciples. Before this passage, Jesus had just spoken to his followers that the Holy Spirit, coming from the Father, would remain with and in them. We hear this in John 14:16–17 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

Jesus also claimed that He and His Father would love and dwell with anyone who follows their words and loves them. John 14:23 “Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” It is in alignment with these words, that the words of Jesus we heard today in John 15, are at the core message to abide in Him, so that one might be fruitful.

While the word Trinity does not appear in Scripture, Jesus is illustrating this leading up to John 15 in mentioning of the Holy Spirit and continues this powerful picture through this metaphor and with a powerful picture of the the Father as the gardener, Jesus as the Vine, and His disciples as the branches. Such that branches that stay connected to the

vine are alive and bear fruit. The key word in this passage is “abide” or “remain.” Jesus repeats it again and again. A disciple who remains connected to Christ lives in close relationship with Him and is completely dependent on Him for life, strength, and growth. This connection is deeply Trinitarian. The Father is the gardener who lovingly tends and prunes the vine. Pruning was known to be essential to provide long-range, healthy fruit. Those leasing a vineyard were responsible for cutting away the useless wood. When the vine is weak, one prunes it more, leaving less fruit, and the next year the vine will be stronger and there will be more grapes. Jesus is the true vine who gives life to the branches. And the Holy Spirit lives within believers, keeping them connected to Christ. Through the Spirit, the Father and the Son dwell with us. So abiding is not simply following rules or believing ideas—it is living in an ongoing relationship with the Triune God.

If we look at the Father’s role, the gardener, He cleanses fruit-bearing branches and cuts off the fruitless ones, ensuring the fruitfulness of the true vine. It was interesting when I read this passage it was when I got to verse 3 that different translations used words that seemed to bear a difference than others. For instance, one translation for John 15:3 states, “You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you.” Trimmed...yeah, that works with the vine imagery. However, other translations state:

John 15:3 “You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.” Cleansed is not often used in agricultural settings, but the spiritual cleansing that produces spiritual fruit is the passage’s actual focus. The term John uses for prunes normally actually means cleanses. So, both Greek and Jewish sources applied this language to inward purification of the heart.

Jesus says: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” And then comes the uncomfortableness...pruning. Not because the branch is hated. Not because the branch is dead. But because it is alive—and capable of bearing even more fruit. Let me say that again, pruning...not because the branch is dead, but because it is alive and capable of bearing even more fruit. Are you in a season where you feel a lot of pruning?

These words are meant to comfort and encourage us, not frighten us. Jesus, whose words have already cleansed His disciples, stands between the gardener—the Father—and the branches—the disciples—as the source of life and connection. Every true disciple who remains connected to Christ, the true vine, will bear fruit. Disciples who remain faithfully in Jesus have a special relationship with the Triune God. While not to frighten us, it doesn’t mean it’s going to be pain-free. Pruning can be painful at the time, but this divine “pruning” is crucial for our spiritual growth and flourishing.

The fruit Jesus describes is not limited to numbers, ministry activity, or outward behaviour alone. Instead, it includes a whole life shaped by Christ: love, obedience, faithfulness, prayer, compassion, and witness. Jesus teaches that this fruit naturally flows from staying connected to Him, since “apart from me you can do nothing.” Ultimately, the passage shifts focus away from performance and toward relationship. True fruitfulness is the result of abiding in Christ and being transformed by Him from the inside out.

This passage also reminds us that spiritual growth is not instant or mechanical. Christian maturity is not something we achieve once and for all. It is a lifelong process of being shaped and transformed through an ongoing relationship with Christ. As we abide in Him, He continues to grow and change us. And this transformation affects every part of our lives—not just what we believe in our minds, but our hearts, attitudes, relationships, choices, character, and actions. Following Jesus is not just learning information; it is learning to live with Him and become more like Him.

So discipleship in John 15 means: staying rooted in Christ because He is the source of life and fruitfulness, growing through an ongoing relationship with Him, remaining connected not only to Christ but also to one another, serving and helping others with dependence on Jesus rather than our own strength, and living in a way that

brings glory to God through a fruitful, Christ-centered life.

Hebrews 12:1–2 says “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” Or as in the Passion translation it says, “We must let go of every wound that has pierced us and the sin we so easily fall into. Then we will be able to run life’s marathon race, with passion and determination, for the path has been already marked out before us.” We must let go of every wound.

As we heard in Hebrews, ‘let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.’ Notice: not just sin... but weights. Some things are not evil, but they are exhausting. Distracting. Spiritually overcrowding. Some things are simply consuming too much space. Clutter that you may need to remove or reduce could be constant busyness, overcommitment, endless scrolling, comparison, resentment, grief, perfectionism, bitterness, needing control, entertainment that numbs, noise and lack of silence, always being productive, unhealthy relationships, saying yes to everything, and even good church activity without actual intimacy with Christ. Not everything that

crowds out Christ is evil. Some things are simply loud. Sometimes the branch isn't dying because it lacks activity. Sometimes it's exhausted because it's carrying too much.

There was a woman who realized she hadn't prayed in silence for months. Not because she didn't love God. Not because she had rejected Him. She was just constantly surrounded by noise.

The alarm clock became a podcast. The drive became phone calls. Cooking became Netflix. Folding laundry became scrolling social media. Every quiet moment was immediately filled. One day she sat down to pray and realized she couldn't focus for more than a few seconds without reaching for her phone. And nothing "bad" had happened. There wasn't some major sin crisis. Her soul had just become overcrowded.

So she started small: Ten minutes every morning with no phone. No music. No multitasking. Just Scripture, silence, and prayer. At first it felt uncomfortable. Then strange. Then peaceful. And what she discovered was: God had not stopped speaking. She had just lost space to listen.

Some of us are not spiritually empty because we stopped loving Jesus. We are simply overcrowded. We have filled every corner of our lives with noise, responsibility, worry, activity, grief, distraction, obligation, and exhaustion. And slowly, without realizing it, abiding became occasional

instead of constant. Not because we rejected Christ. But because we stopped making space for Him.

Just as branches depend completely on the vine for life, we cannot truly live spiritually apart from Jesus. But when we remain connected to Christ, His Spirit works within us and begins to produce His character in our lives. The question becomes: how can we become more aware of our dependence on Jesus each day? Do we pause to recognize and thank God when we begin to see His love, patience, grace, and other fruit growing within us?

Spiritual clutter accumulates over a lifetime. You might be carrying old wounds for decades, unresolved family tension, resentment that has become “normal,” living in constant worry, fear of change, inability to rest, guilt over past mistakes, defining worth by usefulness or productivity, loneliness hidden behind busyness, routines that leave little room for intimacy with Christ, filling life with obligations but neglecting your relationship with God, or simply a life so full of responsibility that abiding becomes secondary.

God removes because He loves, not because He rejects. Jesus changes everything; Not just what we believe. But what we carry. What we cling to. What we make room for. Because following Jesus is not adding Him to an already overcrowded life. It's allowing Him to reshape the whole space.

One of the interesting things about spring cleaning after living somewhere for many years is that you discover how much you've kept "just in case." A drawer full of cords to things you don't even own anymore. Containers with missing lids. Stacks of papers nobody needs. Boxes moved from one place to another without ever being opened. And eventually you realize: some things aren't being kept because they're useful. They're being kept because letting go feels harder.

Spiritually, we can do the same thing. Sometimes we've carried them so long we don't even notice the weight anymore, or our relationship with Christ has become more about duty than abiding. Don't get me wrong, you still believe, you still serve, you still show up, but you realize you haven't slowed down long enough to simply be with Jesus. Or maybe the clutter isn't activity but heaviness. Disappointment accumulated over the years, prayers that seemed unanswered, losses that changed you, weariness that settled into your soul, and after enough time, those things can quietly crowd out joy, trust, expectation, and intimacy with God. But Hebrews says: "Throw off everything that hinders..." Not because God wants to empty our lives, but because He wants us free enough to run again. To abide in Him. Sometimes pruning looks like God saying: "You do not have to carry everything."

Pruning is not just removal of sinful things. Sometimes it is

God gently cutting away what no longer gives life. Some branches need pruning not because they are dead, but because they are tired. And here is the good news: Jesus does not prune us to push us away. He prunes us so we can experience more life. The gardener does not cut the branch because he hates it. He cuts carefully because the branch matters. God is not removing things from your life to make you miserable. He is removing what keeps you from fullness in Him. The goal of spring cleaning is not an empty house, but a livable one. And the goal of spiritual pruning is not an empty life, but a life with room for Christ.

Some of us have spent years moving the same spiritual boxes from room to room. Never opening them. Never surrendering them. Never letting God touch them. But Jesus does not ask us to carry everything forever. “Throw off every weight...” Not so you have less life—but so you can finally live it. Because branches were never meant to carry themselves. They were meant to stay connected to the vine, because you matter.