

READ John 15:1-8 and Isaiah 27:2-8

The Liddle family has shared with you what they have been doing in Germany for the past five years. You have been faithful to support them during that time. You have supported several families on mission around the globe. Together, we are part of that vine that Isaiah talked about.

God is of the opinion that his fruitful vineyard should be sung over, for God is carefully watching over it! Isaiah points out that God also cuts out the briars and thorns he finds in his vine. (Isaiah 27:2-8) That's hard! But the result of God's pruning is fruitful outcomes.

Jesus carries on the vine metaphor when he talks to his beloved disciples. That includes the Liddles, and also you and me. Though we may not think we need it, his pruning is productive. Let's hear the Word. READ John 15:1-8

Notice the map. The vine goes from Duncanville to places around the world as we support our missionaries in Germany, Africa, India, and locations in East Asia. We do this because of our commitment to God's mission and as we remain in Jesus, we are fruitful.

Your giving and prayers for the Liddles, the Walters, the Benitez's, and the Stahl's are the outgrowth of remaining in Jesus. Stewardship and prayer are spiritual disciplines through which we remain in Jesus. Every time you give; every time you pray, you gain more experience of God. God gives you and these families that you support the fruit of productive mission work.

Your giving grows you deeper. Thus it does something not only for them, but also for you. We are a part of the success of these families. Their remaining in Jesus; our remaining in Jesus together brings the fruit.

The vine also winds through Duncanville because Jesus cares about this community. You are his hands for reaching them. It takes connection with Jesus to

- share his Story with the community,
- to share his music,
- to reach out to people who need hope,

- to begin Community Conversations,
- to share the Good News with the people in your neighborhood.

Spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and storytelling, giving of money, food, gifts, talents, and prayer strengthen your connection to Jesus so that you bear fruit.

All of these things we have attempted have been done through a great deal of prayer and faith. Being connected to the vine bears fruit globally and locally.

At the same time, the greatest benefit of staying connected to the vine—to Jesus—is in the family. The deepest work God does when you remain in him affects those immediately around you. They are the most important benefactors.

You may think this is odd or time consuming. Why should I have to be close to Jesus every day? Why should I submit to his pruning? But imagine if you never took a bath or cut your hair—we all need a trim occasionally! We all need the rough edges shaped.

This is a gift to your family members. Jesus is an excellent pruner.

We are warned that if we stop remaining in Jesus, we will stop bearing fruit. We must remain close to his Word or we will get gangly and unhealthy.

Here's a picture of what happens when a plant is left unpruned.



I have experience in this! After studying this lesson, I went out in the yard and took a look at my plant! Here's a picture of my plant now. What we took off, which you can see, was chopped up and is ready for the fire pit in the fall.



We all need pruning. We all know about those areas in ourselves which hurt us and hurt our families. Those things can be replaced with *love* by hanging out with Jesus.

Love is wanting what is best for someone else. Do you want what's best for your family members? Well, we cannot accomplish that ourselves.

Good fruit is not just something *we do*, but something *we are* in our hearts, traits that reflect Christ's love. God has to prune out the bad to produce the love in us that we need.

It is possible to be influenced by Jesus by experiencing him in your daily life. To experience him, you simply talk to him as if he is right here beside you each moment. It's amazing that Jesus is willing to remain with you, or as he says, "in you," because he wants the best for you. What happens in you will radiate out as you relate to your family—that is the most important fruit.

The reason it is important is that every person is important, and you are the best one to love your family members.

You do not have to grit your teeth and do this alone. Jesus comes to you. Did you catch these unimaginable promises?

Promises:

- v. 4 – Remain in me, and I will remain in you
- v. 5 – Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit
- v. 7 – If you remain in me and my words remain in you, *you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!*

Those are stellar promises with great implications.

Did you also catch that each promise comes with a warning listed right after it.

Warnings:

- v. 4b – You cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.
- v. 5b – Apart from me you can do nothing.
- v. 6 – Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.

Like my houseplant.

God's plan is to have an impact on your spirit with God's Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit produces "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). **Those are available blessings.**

These traits are the benefits of your faith. The Spirit is willing to grow them in you. Do you want to experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.? You may need to experience those things yourself—or even have those traits directed toward yourself, that is, you have a more grace-filled attitude toward yourself, and then toward others.

Reality:

- v. 6 – Jesus says, "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father."

Giving time and space to Jesus is the most important aspect of being a Christian.

Remaining in Jesus and Jesus remaining in you. This causes you to produce much fruit, transforming you and as you grow spiritually, then others around you will change, too. This is a huge, desirable, life-enhancing gift from God.

God is completely for you, and willing to make your life fruitful. He takes the time to grow you into a healthy productive vine. What would you like to be transformed in you?

AMEN