

- There is such a stark contrast between Jesus' description of being cut off by the Father and being pruned by the Father. In the midst of such things, it can be difficult to know the difference. We might wonder, am I being pruned back for better things right now? Or am I about to wither up and die? Verse three gives us assurance. We have received the same word that the original disciples did. These words (and the Word himself) is where we find the Way to salvation. So our work is to remain in him. The only way our life produces good fruit is if we are connected to Jesus.
- *Jesus, help me to see and feel the pull of growth that comes with connection with you today. Reveal the places of weak connection and help me to grow strong in you.*

TUESDAY: JOHN 15.5-8

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

- Some have expressed confusion about these words of Jesus. *Whatever I wish will be done for me? Is God like a genie granting wishes?* No! We have to hear this promise in the context of the vine and branches—the connection we have with Jesus. **IF** we remain in Jesus, the things we ask for will be what God wants for us. When we start asking for things that are outside of God's best for us and the world around us, then we can be sure that we are not fully remaining in Christ.
- *God, I want you to receive glory even in the things I ask for today. So guide me with your Spirit all day long and form my heart to desire you.*

WEDNESDAY: EXODUS 19.3-6

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

- God's heart for his people stretches back to the beginning. We see here in Exodus that God is promising continued blessing to God's people as long as they are living in the covenant he has given them. Like the people of Israel, you are now considered by God to be a treasured possession. You are in line to be a priest in the kingdom of God. That is why Jesus is so emphatic that we must abide in him. You yourself have seen how God can carry you through difficult times, cling to the vine he has given us in Jesus!
- *God, your love for me is greater than I can begin to imagine. But I thank you for looking upon me as one who has been brought into this kingdom of yours. Help me to live in this covenant promise you have shared with me in Jesus.*

THURSDAY: JOHN 15.9-17

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have

loved you.¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command.¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

- Jesus simplifies the commands that allow us to remain in his love for us—which is an extension of the love of the Father. *Love each other.* So simple right? Except it is the most costly thing he tells us to do. To make sure we get it, the very next line takes it one step further. To love one another means to lay down your life for one's friends. The disciples didn't fully have the image for this yet, but we do. Jesus on the cross and in the garden outside the empty tomb is the context for understanding the sacrificial love he was talking about. He wasn't telling his disciples to be surface-level nice to each other. He was saying to lay down their lives. That's what love looks like, and that's how to keep the commands of the father, and that's how to remain in the love of Jesus.
- *Jesus, I am not yet able to fully love others the way you have commanded. Thank you for choosing me for this purpose and refine in me the greater love.*

FRIDAY: 2 JOHN 1.5-6

, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.⁶ And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

- John was very consistent in sharing the message of Jesus. The command to love one another is not new, but it seems to be as or more difficult than ever. Here he defines love as this: that we walk in obedience to his commands. How do we know that we are following his commands? With our love for one another. How do we know that we are walking in love? With our obedience to God's commands. Where are you finding it difficult to follow God's commands? Who are you finding it difficult to love?
- *Jesus, I lift up the names of those people or groups of people that I find it difficult to love. I want to show you the love I have for you, so I pray for others and for a heart to love them.*

SATURDAY: ROMANS 5.18-19

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

- Jesus modeled obedience for us. His righteous obedience leads to our own righteousness. Paul lays out the course for the redemption of the Fall from Genesis. We are born into the world of sin introduced through Adam and Eve, but Jesus has made a way for a great reversal...and eventually the whole world will be set right when he returns.
- *Father God, thank you for choosing to redeem this broken world. And thank you for choosing to redeem me through the obedience of your Son.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

The words in bold are take-aways from this week's message.

Obedience is necessary for connection.

Connection is necessary for obedience.

- Take a few minutes to write down all of the words that come to mind when you hear the word *Obedience*. Share as a group. Are there any mixed feelings about obedience?
- Next, take a few minutes to write down the thoughts and images that come to mind when you hear the word *Connection* especially as it relates to your relationship with God.

Connection is the secret to bearing fruit.

- Jesus uses the imagery of a vine and branches. How does this help you to understand God's desire for your relationship with Jesus? How would you rate your current connection with Jesus? Are you deeply connected? Barely hanging on?

Remaining in the Word is important for connection.

- Consider your connection with Jesus the Vine today. Now hear this, "If what Jesus says is true _____." How would you fill in the blank?