

# A Productive Relationship

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 September 2025

Preacher: Kevin Smith, Senior Pastor

[ 0 : 00 ] John chapter 15 beginning in verse 1. I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.

! And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he 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 burn.

[ 1 : 04 ] If you abide in me and my words abide in you, 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.

The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord remains forever. Remember, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. It's probably true.

Yeah, I think it's true. All of us hope that in our lifetime, in our lives, we will enter into productive relationships with other people, especially in marriage.

Now, a productive relationship is defined like this. I asked AI. It knows everything. It is one where a lot of good and useful things happen as a result of the connection between people, involving neutral respect, open communication, shared decision-making, and support for each other's goals.

Now, examples would be, of course, in marriage and close friendships, etc. Now, keep in mind, a productive relationship, therefore, is mutually beneficial.

[ 2 : 54 ] No one gets more or puts in more than the other. When there's an imbalance, we sometimes use words like codependent relationships, parasitic or even abusive relationships.

When one party is benefiting so much more from that relationship, it's painful.

Now, though different from human relationships, I can't say relationship too well. It's hard to say relationship. Every single sermon, I say relationship, but I get tongue-tied.

It's frustrating. Though different from human relationships, our relationship with our Lord Jesus is designed by him to be productive.

We have entered into a productive relationship with Jesus. Actually, it's the most productive relationship you can ever have.

[ 4 : 14 ] But it's not mutually beneficial. We bring nothing, or at least very little, to the table.

A productive relationship with the Lord is one where we depend on him for everything.

Lopsided? Yes. Right? Yes. So who are you depending on? Remember where we are.

Our Lord has been telling his disciples about the role of the helper. Remember? The role of the spirit. Chapter 14. Spent weeks looking at this. He called him the spirit of truth. He finally called him the Holy Spirit.

In those passages, you see that the Lord is talking about his return to glory, and he will give this helper to the church, to his people.

[ 5 : 22 ] Now, here's the thing. I think it's a mistake to end that teaching at the end of chapter 14. And then return to it later in chapter 15 into 16.

I think in chapter 15, where we just read, he's still talking about the work of the spirit. He's still talking about the work of the helper. And so I'm going to teach, preach it in that sense, because he doesn't stop, start, stop, start again.

It's all one flow. It's all the work of the spirit who makes our relationship with God through faith in Jesus productive.

Now, according to the last verse in chapter 14, Jesus and the disciples have just left the upper room, and they're on, remember, just that night, he's on his way to the garden of Gethsemane at this point.

Likely, he's walking down the street, and the disciples are listening to him continue to teach them on this last night before he is betrayed and crucified.

[ 6 : 32 ] He's using an image here. Possibly, we think, some scholars think that he might have passed by either a vine or vineyard or passed by the temple where there would have been an engraving of the vineyard there on the new Herod's temple.

whatever it is, he uses this image of the vine that they would understand. I mean, how do you grow grapes for making wine?

You've got to do... That's what they... They would understand. What is the relationship between the vine and the branches that bear the grapes? So he says, look at this, and let me tell you about you and me.

So the point we're going to look at today, the Spirit creates or even cultivates the process for fruitfulness in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

Now, this is the... Now, verses 1 through 3. This is the basic statement of the entire passage. I am the true vine. My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

[ 7 : 46 ] Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may be more fruitful. Already you are clean because of the words that I've spoken to you. This is the basic statement that covers this whole section.

First of all, notice the Lord gives us that last I am statement. I am the vine. Once again, he's identifying himself with the great I am of the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3.

When Moses sees the bush burning, take off, the bush speaks to him. The bush that's on fire but not being consumed starts to speak. It's God's presence.

God is there and he tells Moses when Moses asks him, well, you want me to go back to Egypt but who shall I say sent me? What is your name? Because remember, all the gods of Egypt had names.

So Moses realizes, I gotta have a name. I gotta take, I gotta take, who are you? And God gives him the most incredible name. The name that has so much mystery attached to it.

[ 8 : 56 ] Just tell them I am. Tell them I am has sent me to you. I am. I exist. I am the ever existing one.

I have always existed. Will always exist. There is no existence without me. I'm it. That still gives me goose pimples.

The Lord takes that name to himself seven times in the Gospel of John. He wants us to get it. Who is speaking? Who has come among us?

It is nothing less than God in human flesh. The I am has come to save his people. That's what happened in Egypt. Moses wasn't the deliverer.

God delivered his people. He happened to use Moses. Second thing I want you to notice. The vine in those days was a symbol of Israel.

[ 10 : 02 ] Israel. Like I said, it was an engraving on the temple as you went into the Holy of Holies possibly as well. But the point is this. Our Lord is using an Old Testament language when he describes himself as the true vine.

When Jesus says, I'm the true vine, he's going back to Old Testament. He's, Israel was God's vineyard and vine. Several passages bring that out.

Allow me to just look at two with you. Isaiah chapter, chapter five verses one through five. And by the way, this image of Israel as the vine is never good.

At least from what I've seen. Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed it out a wine vat in it and he looked for it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes.

[ 11 : 13 ] And now, oh habitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done?

When I look for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured.

I will break down this wall and it shall be trampled down. God says, Israel, you are my vineyard and I know what I'm doing.

I planted you in fertile ground. I gave you the best care possible and when I came looking for grapes from you, you gave me wild grapes, grapes I can't eat.

In other words, Israel, you didn't keep the covenant with me. You weren't productive in the way you should have been. what am I going to do?

[ 12 : 25 ] You saw what he said. Break down the walls. I'm going to start over. Psalm chapter 80. There's several patterns, just these, just these two.

Psalm chapter 80, beginning at verse 8. The psalmist says, you bought 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. The mountains were covered with its shade. The mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the river. Why then have you broken down its walls so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

The boar from the forest ravages it and all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts. Look down from heaven and see.

Have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted and for the son whom you made strong for yourself for they have burned it with fire. They have cut it down.

[ 13 : 34 ] May they perish at the rebuke of your face. In Isaiah, God says he was going to do it. In Psalm 80 he had done it and the psalmist is saying look what's happened to Israel.

Look what's happened to your people because they forsook you. Do something Lord. He says they were good for nothing but burning.

They were a wild vine, wild grapes, unfaithful. Israel. But then Jesus says come on now but Jesus says I am the true vine.

Not Israel. That's not the true vine. Israel was supposed to be but Israel they weren't consistent enough. They weren't good enough.

Something better had to come. Jesus says I am I am the true vine. The true and faithful Israel. Your true son.

[ 14 : 40 ] God the son has come. The I am in human flesh is what Israel should have been. He is the good vine who bears good fruit unlike Israel.

Jesus hints then that those who claim to be his disciples are the branches in his vine in verse 3. He hints it at verse 3. When we come back to the text next time you'll see he begins to really flesh that out.

He says some bear fruit. Some branches disciples in the vine some of them bear fruit and others do not. The unfruitful branches he says are removed and the fruitful branches are pruned.

Literally they're cleaned. That is disciple fruitful disciple he says are cut back so that they might bear even more fruit.

General principle here in the passage but an important one. Now listen I know a lot about pruning. I've told this story years ago so some of you already forgot so I can tell it again.

[ 15 : 48 ] My wife remembers everything. When we lived in Maryland we had some rose bushes in the back of our house. the people who lived in the house before us didn't take care of them and Kevin Smith knows nothing about rose bushes.

So my rose bushes might have been maybe two or three of them together they were this high they were up here above my head and they were all over the wall and then they spread out over the yard a little bit and so every time I cut the grass I'm under the bush and it hit me I'm trying to cut the grass and it hit me in the head I was missing I hated those rose bushes so after a few years I'm sorry after a couple years of this I had enough I got my head trimmer tool time baby I said I'm going to get rid of you man I went in when I got done with them bad boys they were down here I mean think about it they were above I'm six feet they were probably seven feet they went down to maybe three feet

I was happy part of me hoped I had killed it and if you would have go by those bushes you would have said yeah you killed it but something funny happened was it the next year it was the next year not even the next year the most beautiful roses sprouted all over those bushes yes I was like what it's not dead they were so beautiful Sandy cut them off on Mother's Day took them to church and

gave small bouquets to all the mothers in our congregation that's how beautiful they were what happened I pruned it I didn't know what I was doing I pruned it and because I pruned it not only did they come back but they bore the most beautiful roses we had ever seen you see I did what they needed me to do that's what they needed all the time the whole time that's what they really needed somebody who knew what they were doing to come along and cut them back severely cut them back so they could be more fruitful our Lord is saying that the father prunes believers that we might be more productive more fruitful cutting here seems to suggest some type of hardships that those without spiritual eyes will look to them like judgment or even death without spiritual eyes if you look at a believer who's being pruned you might think that God ain't real God ain't with him God ain't with them but in reality because they are in covenant with God because they are in Christ what's happening even though it's hard even though it looks bad what's happening is God is doing something to make them grow he's he's using these hardships where some blessings may be taken away to make way for even greater blessings and those greater blessings will also mean greater spiritual growth greater spiritual growth is not independence greater spiritual growth is greater dependence upon Jesus for everything it might be the only relationship I can think of in human in humankind where you are where you actually grow up by being more dependent

[ 20 : 25 ] I'm trying to think of one maybe as an infant whatever let me think of one let me get back to me now see I'm reminded here of something the apostle Paul said now because he had been a great comfort to me personally and I shared it with a PCA pastor recently who was going through a great deal of trial and pain even from other Christians and I shared this passage with him because again I knew I believe God would use it to bless him the passage of 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 verses 8 through 10 yeah it's up there Paul is speaking he's kind of his own personal testimony for we do not want you to be unaware brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia we don't know what that affliction was we have ideas but we're not sure he didn't tell us for we were so greatly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself now stop there whatever was happening it was so pressing that the apostle thought he was going to die he said we despaired of life itself but notice what the purpose was indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on

God who raises the dead he delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again notice he says delivered three times delivered delivered from here from who from where from God but notice what the hardship was designed to do the hardship in his case that put his life at risk that's deep y'all his life he about to lose some comfort his hotel wasn't what he expected when he was traveling to preach the gospel his car broke down he ain't talking about that stuff he talking about folk were gonna kill! me! but I went through this wow isn't that beautiful that I might this is the apostle talking to make me rely not on myself I'm using his I'm personalizing for him not make me not rely on myself but on God who raises the dead see that's pruning!

pruning that's pruning the apostle Paul who was probably one of the most fruitful Christians ever to live whose life gave us most of the New Testament half the New Testament and that this guy still needed to be pruned by God he still needed to grow Jesus was still working with the apostle Paul and he brings him to a place because of the work he was doing he brings him to a place where he is so out of control he has no power he has no way of coming out of this unless God does something and he says the purpose of it was that I would learn to rely on him more learn to depend on him more learn to count on him more because Paul was very gifted it would have been very easy for a man that gifted to rely on his gifts to count on his gifts and so the Lord was continually helping him understand that it's better to have the giver than to have the gifts the giver is more important than the gifts!

[ 24 : 33 ] and the giver is even able to raise the dead so whatever you're going through he's saying don't worry if I have to I can raise you from the dead if I have to so depend on me I've got I've got the power Jesus in John 15 is once again showing us where the power is this greatly depressing hardship was not because of sin in Paul's life that we can see was about growth just remember the false teachers in Corinth were telling the congregation Paul was suffering so much because he was a fake apostle it was an early version of the faith prosperity gospel you see if you have real faith in God you're not going to suffer like that you'll be healthy wealthy and wise at all times if you have faith in

God that's fake teaching that's false gospel false teaching and is dangerous and deadly no and they got it right here so what does Paul do in 2 Corinthians he lists his sufferings I think about three or four times Paul makes a list of his sufferings and pain and tears in this letter so that he says my suffering is proof that I'm an apostle he suffered because of his faithful preaching of the gospel and so he wore his hardship for Christ as a badge of honor how about you are your hardships merely there that cause you discomfort and some of you are suffering greatly I have much respect so please hear me

I'm not minimizing! anything I'm just pointing you upwards whatever you're going through the hardships you're feeling if you belong to Jesus he's at work to prune you and it's not just individual Christians I want to tell you collective Christians go through the same thing churches experience God's pruning not just Christians not just individuals if it's individuals it's going to happen to the collective if you study church history I will say western church history because that's what I've studied churches at some point will stagnate they'll be huge they'll be growing and powerful but at some point in the life of every church that has those times of great growth at some point that church stagnates stops growing at that point that church has to make a decision will we trust God and go deeper or we try to do the same thing we always done it happens to every single church because churches sometimes take

God's blessings for granted and sometimes get proud so the great vine dresser goes to work unproductive! or even destructive members are removed from the fellowship productive members you're saying well you're moving you're you're what Lord why are you taking you know even those members will be moved for some reason or members who used to be productive will be moved for some reason but all of it is done so that that congregation can grow in a direction the Lord intends so how should you respond to pruning in your life how should we respond to pruning in a church's life how should you respond mourning over loss maybe maybe but how about this how about repentance faith prayer rejoicing perseverance in the word and the work because you know that God is doing to do something even more productive in you where do I get that from Paul first if you 2nd Corinthians turn to chapter 12 and you'll see exactly what Paul does 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 now remember this in this chapter he's talking about the thorn in the flesh he's been given Paul he said I've had these great revelations God has shown me my matter of chapter 11 he lists his sufferings again that's the last list of his sufferings and then he says chapter 12 he says and then he adds this to his sufferings yeah God I got a thorn in my flesh a messenger of Satan was sent to buffet me to hinder me to hold me back he says I besought the Lord I pray to the Lord three times three times I cried out to God will you remove this thing starting verse seven so to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations a thorn was given me in the flesh a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from becoming conceited three times [ 30 : 28 ] I pleaded with the Lord about this that it should leave me but he said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness he got a word from God that in the midst of his suffering he could depend on Jesus his grace was greater than his suffering his grace was sufficient for him in the midst of his pain in the midst of his cancer diagnosis in the midst of his of the word that he was going to lose she was going to lose her job in the midst of some great in the midst of a church going through hard times listen Paul cries out the words of Jesus to us his grace is sufficient for you for his strength is made perfect in your weakness Gideon would have found that out too right give it all of them just keep those 300 now watch this

I promised you the response here's the response Paul's response therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses the things he's suffering so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for the sake of Christ then I am content with weaknesses insults hardships persecutions and calamities for when I am weak then I am strong the word gladly he says that word means that's a translation could be most gladly that's the depth of that word most gladly will I boast most gladly a feeling of joy pleasure delighted and pleased most gladly I think Paul was I mean did they have marijuana back there or something

I don't know what this boy is smoking I will boast all the more gladly I will be pleased all the more I will rejoice all the more I will be delighted all the more about my weaknesses we try to hide our weaknesses I don't want you to see my weaknesses it's like being naked I don't want to be naked but that's the response to pruning that's the response to whatever God is doing yeah we can we can don't mean you don't mean you're not a robot remember Paul prayed Paul was upset Paul felt the pain amen what did he do with it he went to Jesus this is holding me back this is hurting me do

something Lord Lord said I already have and I'll do some more of it too I've given you grace I've given you me dependence on me the great vine the true vine dependence on me lean in Paul lean in don't run away lean in to me let me put my arms around you let me surround you let me hold you Paul don't try to be an independent child who told you to be independent of me spiritual growth is more dependence upside upside down kingdom more dependence so let me ask you have you by the Lord's grace and mercy been a faithful disciple of Jesus not perfect faithful and yet you are facing hardship yet you're facing great pain in your body in your social life in your work life wherever it is you're facing pain is that something you caused per se maybe you did maybe you have sin but God Jesus died for your sins and you wonder why you're going through this listen don't fall into depression over what is gone remember what remembering what used to be God doesn't go backwards he goes forward remember you have Jesus his grace and his spirit John 14 you have his spirit and his guaranteed inheritance which you can never lose in Jesus you have stuff you can never lose it can't be taken away so what are you going to do ask him to help you get up and to double down on following him to ask to help to deal with the pain to deal with it you got to deal with it look it in the face I see you pain I see you suffering I'm not blind I'm not hiding my head in the dirt I see you but I see Jesus more the true vine I'm in the vine his life is in me !!

[ 35 : 38 ] I am depending upon you Jesus to take I gotta walk the way of suffering it's scary Lord I don't know if we're gonna make it yes you are you will get as far as the Lord Jesus wants you to get and not one bit will you be behind you will get just where he wants you trust him keep walking and the devil will be mad he will lose!

his lunch he will be jumping! up and down screaming mad at you because he's hoping you will quit he's hoping you'll quit in some way he's hoping you'll withdraw he's hoping you'll become cynical he's hoping you'll become poisonous and bitter and you know what happens when you become bitter the Bible says a root of bitterness rises up in the church and defiles many that's chapter 12 of Hebrews verse 15 I'm quoting the text when you don't deal with suffering whatever it is you will become bitter and anybody connected to you will experience your bitterness and poison repent of that gossip!

gossip stops happening and you're just always cynical ain't nothing good ain't never happened in my life ain't no good at this church and you're bitter and you're dangerous repent before the Lord before he removes you because he's at work in you your disappointment he's at work if you trust him if you lean in he's about to do something great that you will beckon and say wow praise God thank you Lord praise God he said in John 15 to the disciples you are clean because of the word that I spoken to you the word cleanses us as we come to the word we allow his word to speak to deal with us and we experience greater cleansing so we can follow and depend on him even more you are

God's rosebush each one of you you're God's rosebush and together we are one huge rosebush before the Lord and at times he needs to trim us and at times he needs to prune us it's not because he wants to destroy us it's because he wants to make us more beautiful more fruitful and who gets the glory the rosebush no who gets the glory is the vine dresser the vine dresser gets the glory the father gets the glory he say it later in the text the father gets the glory because he knows how to cultivate a bush baby and in your life he's cultivating you too may God have mercy may God help us to see it may we depend on Jesus together more and more amen amen father bless your word to your people's hearts and to our lives and to the!

church thank you for Pastor may bear witness to you in such a profound way in so many different ways even within our very biological!

[ 39 : 19 ] as we trust in Christ he showed us some beautiful things in your word thank you for Joe and thank you for this church may we walk in faith in Jesus may we be true faithful branches in the true vine in his name we pray!

Amen!