



TIME OF GRACE®

Jesus #nofilter: Connected to Jesus, You Will Grow Study Notes

Summary

There are three crucial moments in every person's spiritual journey that will test their commitment to Jesus. What do we do when confronted with these crucial moments of confusion, condemnation, and temptation? In one of Jesus' powerful teachings, he reveals himself in a way that tackles all three crucial moments—and it starts with Jesus calling himself the vine. Pastor Mike continues this series that looks at the offensive, unfiltered, hard teachings of Jesus.

- 3 Crucial Christian Moments = _____, _____, _____.
- John 15:1-2 — I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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.



- John 15:3 — You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

- John 15:4-9 — 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. 5 “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. 9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

Points to Ponder

1. Evaluate: Doing life with other Christians is one of the best ways to get through the three crucial moments we discussed in today’s message.
2. Meditate on the rest of Jesus’ vine/branches message in John 15:10-17.
3. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Is there anything standing in the way of you being a joyful, generous giver? If so, what small step could you take this week to pursue a life of financial generosity?

Homework for Next Week

Read John 14:1-6

Time of Grace Ministry
Jesus #nofilter: Connected to Jesus, You Will Grow
John 15
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Pastor Mike Novotny

There are three crucial moments in every person's spiritual journey. Moments that truly test our commitment to Christianity, to Jesus Christ himself, and this faith that we profess. And I can almost guarantee that if you haven't been there yet, you are now or you will be soon. If it's not one, it might be both, for some of you, it will be all three. And I want to prepare you for those moments and help you get through those moments.

So, grab a pen if you're watching at home, taking notes. Here's the first crucial moment of the Christian faith, I'm going to call it confusion. Confusion is when you're trying really hard to be a good Christian, but life is not going well. You know, the time when you're not forgetting to pray but you're praying, you're not skipping church, you're going, you're not ignoring the Bible, but opening its pages. You are trying to do the best that you can and yet, the problems that you face aren't getting better, in fact, sometimes they get worse. It's really confusing when you're trying to be faithful to God, you're trying to turn to Him with all of your problems, but God, instead of fixing your problems, lets them remain. In fact, sometimes he turns up the intensity of your pain.

It's like when you're trying to be faithful to God with your money. You know, some people don't give a dollar to anyone else, it's all for themselves, but you're not like that. You're trying to think about those who are in need, you're trying to give to the poor, even if you're, kind of poor yourself. You're giving money in church to support the spread of the gospel, and yet at the end of the day, instead of opening up for you that financial door, instead of giving you that good job that you're satisfied with, giving you the promotion, the raise; you see the bills stacking up and your financial stress increasing.

And, it's really confusing. If I'm trying to honor God in this area of my life, I'm trying to follow his teaching, why won't he bless me in return? Why are people who don't even believe in God or care about God, who are super greedy and not generous, why do they prosper financially and not me? Spiritually and logically, that doesn't make much sense. It's confusion.

Or you go to school and you're trying to be the good Christian kid. You know, some kids get into their cliques, they say mean things about other people, they're bullying one another, you're not going to do that. You're going to stand up for the little guy, you're going to stand up for what's right. You do the right thing but sometimes that costs you. And instead of being the good kid that everyone wants to be friends with,

sometimes you end up on the outside of the circle. You eat lunch by yourself, you go home, you hate school, and you don't want to go back. And it's confusing. I mean, you're not perfect but you're trying to be good, why won't God give you a better experience?

Or you start a business, and you want that business to just have good values that people enjoy working at. You're not going to cut corners, you're not going to take advantage of the system, you're going to treat people with respect. You would assume, if you're doing that, God would bring to you the right people, the right managers, the right employees, he would bless you with a great career and experience; but that doesn't always happen. Sometimes people walk away from great managers, they leave great companies. Why would God do that?

Or maybe you come to church and you learn how God wants relationships to work. You first. So, you do your best to serve your husband, to be a blessing to your wife, you try to listen to what they're going through, speak their love language, put them first as often as you can but sometimes spouses don't reciprocate. And you feel like you're giving and giving, not just for a day or a week or a month, but a whole year you are trying; and yet the relationship doesn't get better. And that's confusing. Why would God? It almost seems like punishing someone who is trying their best.

And sometimes this happens with Christian couples who take seriously God's commands of sexuality. They're trying to wait, they're trying to be patient, they're trying to honor the institution and covenant of marriage, and so they don't give in. Even though they want to. And then that wedding day comes and they take their vows; and for some couples, that part of their life is really complicated. They struggle with their sexual relationship or they want to start a family and have kids but they battle infertility. And meanwhile over here, you know, you have friends who really don't care about the Bible and its teachings, and its restrictions, and they seem fine and they seem like they're having fun. They have kids without even trying. That's super confusing. Why would God look at a family who's sincerely trying to follow him and not bless them with the things that they want the most?

I'd summarize it this way. When you're trying be a good Christian and God does not give you a good life, and you look around and see people who are not even trying to be good Christians and they seem to have a better life; that is really disorienting and that's the crucial moment that I'm calling confusion.

But there's a second moment. Write this down. The second crucial moment is condemnation. Condemnation is when you look in the mirror and all you feel about yourself spiritually is negative. We sing the songs in church, those passages about God and His love, but it just -- it can't penetrate because you're just thinking of that thing that you did or the thing that you said or that thing that you keep struggling with. You look yourself in the mirror and it's just so -- it's fresh, it's raw, and it's hard to believe that God looks at you and sees someone that he actually likes.

Or for some of you, that's because of something big in your past. You know, you pushed and paid for her abortion, you were unfaithful to your boyfriend years ago, you said something to your mom or dad or your ex that just came out of your pain and your hurt. It was ugly, it was unchristian, you remember the words. For some people it's not a big thing in the past but just a continual struggle. Like, "I make these promises to God, I confess my sins in church, I tell God that I'm going to do better and try harder, and yet, again and again and again. I say I'm not going to worry; I'm not going to be afraid; I'm not going to be anxious, I'm going to trust, I'm going to have faith, I'm going to remember God. I fail. I'm not going to get into it with him again or her again. They know how to push my buttons so I'm going to be better, I'm going to be the bigger person," and then, again. "I'm done with drinking, I'm done with using, I'm done with pornography, I'm done with all that." And then... and whether it's something really big that happened one time or something that just happens all the time, it's hard to actually believe God looks at you and loves you, looks at you and sees someone who is clean in his sight.

And if those two challenges weren't enough, then there's the third crucial moment, temptation. Temptation is when you are seriously second guessing if you want to keep doing all of this stuff. Maybe you were raised in a church. Maybe you prayed at home, Bible stories, Sunday school, Christian education; but sometimes you go along in life, and you seriously wonder, is this the kind of person that I want to be? You know, the Bible has its truth and its rules and its restrictions. Mom, your grandma, whatever, believed this about Jesus. You want to be a church-going, Bible-believing, Jesus-following person. We're tempted to question that, when we realize how hard it is to follow Jesus; but especially, I would say, when you meet someone who doesn't follow Jesus and their life is fine. Where you're struggling to be Biblical about it, and then your best friend who has no desire to go to church, it's not like their life is a total train wreck, and you wonder is this worth it?

I'm trying to submit my whole life to the Christian faith. My money, my time, my body, my desires, my everything and now here's my friend who doesn't care at all about any of that stuff and he's fine. His family is fine and he's happy. Is this worth it? In most of our spiritual journey as we run into confusion or condemnation, or temptation, or two at a time, or all three; it really makes us wonder. When life is bad or when I feel bad or I wonder if Christianity is really that good, what do I do?

And if you can't relate to any of that just yet, I would propose this. For a whole bunch of us in the room right now, before this year is over, those crucial moments are going to happen. Alright? It really only takes one tragic car accident or one unexpected diagnosis for a stable Christian to be plunged into confusion. It only takes one night, one choice, one word for us to struggle with condemnation. It only takes one friend who's not following Jesus to really make us rethink our faith and lead us into temptation. So, what do you do? What do we do when faced with these three crucial moments?

Well, today Jesus is going to tell us because on the Thursday night before the Friday that Jesus died, he gave this powerful teaching to his closest friends. He was in an

upper room with Peter and James and John and the bunch; and he called himself by a certain name. He revealed himself in a certain way that in less than ten verses, Jesus actually tackled these three crucial problems.

Today, as I have a chance to teach you John 15, the words of Jesus; we're going to find out exactly what to do with confusion and condemnation and temptation. So, if you have a Bible with you, you can open to John 15, where we hear Jesus speaking these words when you and I struggle with pain, suffering, and spiritual confusion. He says this, "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." If you're struggling with confusion, Jesus wants to take you out to the garden. He wants to remind you that his father is like a good gardener. And when a good gardener sees a branch with tons of potential, one Jesus says, that does produce fruit, do you know what a good garden does? He prunes it, snips it, he cuts it, he wounds it. Because he's a grumpy gardener? No. He had a bad day with a spouse, so he's taking it out on the garden? Nope. Jesus says, "He prunes it so that it will be even more fruitful."

Hmm... Just imagine for a second that you all are a big garden. Each of you is an individual branch stuck into a vine and I'm the gardener and I show up with these scissors. I see the look on your face, Wyatt. What would you say if I came in... for a little snip? You would say, "Help, somebody. You monster, you murderer." And I'm like cut you once and then I cut you again, I was laughing with a smile on my face, I cut you a third time. What would you think about me? Oh, you'd think the worst, unless, unless, unless you understood the point of a garden.

That's actually what my friend, Marty, taught me. Let me show you a picture. Marty owns a vineyard right here in Central Wisconsin. I've had a chance to sample some of his wines doing some events at this beautiful vineyard. And as soon as I read Jesus' words, I reached out to Marty and said, "Hey, as a guy who does this for a living, what can you tell me about pruning?" He replied, "The biggest mistake that people make is not pruning aggressively. The better the pruning, the more fruitful the grapes."

Hmm... Apparently, if the goal is to produce the most fruit, the biggest mistake you could make is not pruning aggressively. And our heavenly father knows that's true about you. If God's goal for your life was just comfort from birth until death, right? Put you in a Snuggie, get you a nice, warm tea. "Y'all, don't work, don't do anything hard, like, just my goal for you is to be as comfortable and laid back." If that was his goal, then pruning would be shocking and pain would be surprising but if that's not God's goal, if God's goal for you is to be fruitful, and by that the Bible means like Jesus, humble, kind, generous, compassionate, empathetic, forgiving, strong. If that's God's goal, would you not agree that sometimes pain and suffering is the best thing to make us that kind of people?

Alright, how about this one. When you hear a story about a trust fund baby, some kid who was born into insane wealth, billions from birth, never wanted for anything, got everything they wanted, as comfortable as comfortable can be, seven years old

sitting on some beach that you'll never be able to afford, do you think, "Well, there's the best human being on earth?" No, no, no, no. You know that sometimes when it's easy, you don't become a great person, right? If you never had to struggle to get something good, if getting grades came easy for you without studying, if you're naturally athletic and you didn't have to work for it, just everything came your way, does that make you a humble, kind, patient person? Actually, sometimes it's just the opposite. If it's been easy in your life, when other people are struggling, you don't know how to help them, "Just, well, do it," you think, "Like me." But when God... when God cuts something back, like your health was here... [Scissors Snipping] And you had this much in the bank... [Scissors Snipping] Right? And life was this good... [Scissors Snipping] And your mom was there, and your dad was there, and your family was there... [Scissors Snipping] Sometimes it is those moments that actually give us a better faith.

It humbles us so that we end up humble like Jesus. When we've experienced pain, we're able to sympathize with people's pain, just like Jesus. When God doesn't give us what we want when we want it, it makes us patient like Jesus. I've actually learned this in life. Most of the best things that I do to help you as a church have been birthed out of my hardest experiences, the things that were not easy at time, right? I wouldn't have chosen those things, but looking back, I'm not sure if I would change those things because the hard times shape us, they refine us, or Jesus would say, they prune us.

So, Jesus wants you to know the next time it happens, the next time you want God to do this, and he doesn't, don't assume he's punishing you, he's not, he's pruning you, he's preparing you. Because in all things, God works for the good of those who love him. The old saying that there's always a reason, there's always a purpose, there's always a plan that is Biblically true because Jesus said in his teaching, "Every branch that does bear fruit, my father prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Believe that and you will not be confused by your pain. Believe that and you'll stop asking the unanswerable question, "Why, God?" And you'll start asking more Biblical question, "What now, God? What are you going to do now? What will you produce in me? You took this away but you promised it must be fru -- Where are you redirecting me? Where are you putting my time and energy? I wanted this, you cut it back, but I can do that." Believe in Jesus' teaching on pruning and you'll overcome the critical and crucial moment called confusion.

Well, that brings us to crucial moment number two. What about condemnation? You just can't let it go, can't forgive yourself, can't get past the past, how do you handle that? Well, in one single verse, I think Jesus is going to give you amazing help. Here's what he says in John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." Because of what he was about to do and because God already saw it happening in the future, he could say with confidence to every Christian because of the mercy, and the forgiveness, and the love, and the salvation of that weekend, the cross and the empty tomb, "You who believe in me are already clean."

And what Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, he says now to you. You might be as flawed as Peter, struggling with foot-in-mouth disease every day, you might talk big like James and John and bail when the moment gets difficult. He's not waiting for that to get better until he says this, "Already clean." Now, that's hard to believe in moments of self-condemnation, so we're going to practice here today.

So, this is the crowd participation part of church. If you're watching at home, you can join us too, alright? When I do this... you're going to say, "Already clean." And if you, kind of, whisper and mumble, this part's going to be really lame and the I'm going to be moody for the rest of the sermon, so don't do that to me, alright? So, I need all of you to participate alright, let's practice, ready? Already... clean. Yeah, very good. Alright, now I'm going to pretend like I'm a person who's just struggling with the past or the present, I'm stuck in my sin, I just can't get my eyes fixed over to Jesus. And every time I do this, you're going to say, "Already clean."

Okay, let's practice. So, let's imagine that I have a really messy legal record. Alright, you could look up my name on the internet and find it and you could find what I did, what the judge said, and a price that I have to pay. Maybe I'm still on parole, maybe I'm sitting in a jail cell right now and I just think, "How stupid was that? One night I threw away years, I messed up my family, I have a court case coming up, what are people going to say? Are they going to think less of me?" But when God looks at me, because of the mercy, faith of Jesus, I'm declared...

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

Or let's imagine that I'm a person who just jacked up my own family. Right? I wasn't happy in marriage, so I strayed, and I flirted and flirting led to something I can't forgive myself for. Now my marriage ended and my kid that I love has two toothbrushes, and two beds he has to sleep in, and two schedules to handle. I did that, there are consequences to the choices that I made. How could I stand before God and possibly smile? And Jesus said, "Because the blood I shed, even you are..."

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

Yeah. But what if I'm still struggling? I told God, I'm done with drinking, I'm done with smoking, I'm done with clicking, I'm done with losing my cool. Jesus says, "Even though you do the things you hate, and you don't do the things that you love, I died for people just like that. I declare that you are..."

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

But what if I said...

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

But what if I...

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

But what if...

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

But...

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

Hmm...

CONGREGATION: Already clean.

Yeah, Jesus says, "Stop objecting, this is forgiveness freely given. This isn't me making you earn it. Other religions do that, but I don't. So, I can look Peter in the eye hours before he denies me and I can say, 'I'm not waiting till you're perfect, Peter, because my sacrifice is perfect.' I've declared by my blood and through my word that you are already clean."

Friends, do you regret the things you've done? I do. And do you wish you could go back and just be a better person, better Christian? I do too. But the good news of our faith is that Jesus doesn't wait until we're perfect, he makes us perfect by his blood. If you feel condemned, then run to Jesus. He can clear us free of charge, there's no condemnation for those who trust in him.

On our last big section, Jesus wants to answer that question emphatically, starting in verse 4, here's what he says, "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. 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. 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. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."

If repetition is meant to teach us anything, there's one word Jesus doesn't want you to forget, "Remain." He said, "Remain, remain, remain, remain, remain, remain, remain, remain, remain, remain." Nine times Jesus chooses this word, "Remain in me as I remain in you, remain in my love, remain, remain, remain, remain." And why would we remain with Jesus? "Jesus, it's hard to stick with you, it's hard to follow you, it's hard not to follow the ways of the world, the ways of my own heart, why would I do that?" I hope it doesn't happen to you, the confusion and the condemnation and the temptation, but when it does, grab your Bible, open it up to John 15, and let Jesus tell you exactly how to get through it. God's not punishing you, he's pruning you. He isn't done with

you, you're already clean in his sight. Remain in his love because as the Father has loved Jesus, so has he loved you. Let's pray.

Lord, I don't know the specifics, but I have to imagine there's someone watching today who is so confused by their pain, their body hurts, their family is a mess, their finances are getting worse and they don't understand why you don't fix it. God help them to not just hear this message, but believe it that you are pruning them, not because you're mad but because you want something really good, and this is the best way to produce fruit.

Help us to trust you when life is difficult, to remember what Job said that sometimes you give and sometimes you take, but your name is always worthy to be praised. God, I love that our church brings people from all kind of backgrounds, people with legal records, multiple divorces in their past, struggling with addiction, drugs in their present.

God, I thank you that they're here to hear this message that people like me and them and Peter and John are already clean because of Jesus. Those aren't just words that you spoke flippantly, Jesus, you meant them. Help us to believe them.

And finally, Father, I pray for everyone but especially the younger people here today. This culture has forgotten about eternity and therefore the present feels like everything, but it is not. Seeing your face is what eternity is all about. Help us to stick with Jesus and not be jealous of the fun and freedom of this world, but to believe whatever we have to sacrifice for him is worth it. Because the love of Jesus is an eternal treasure, help us to believe that he is worthy.

Finally, Father, continue to bless our church. Some messages like today can be hard but we don't want to filter Jesus. We don't want to edit him, we don't want to shape him in our image, we want to be shaped in his. So, may we be that kind of church and may we be that kind of people. We pray this all in Jesus' beautiful name, and everyone who agreed said amen.