



Weekly Booster

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Sunday Praise Team

Terry Stafford, Linda Haldane,

Margaret Brady, Deb Finlay,

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God the Gracious Gardener

Throughout John 15, we read about the way in which God deals with three different kinds of branches. First, we read about what God does with unproductive branches, and if truth be told, it sounds a little harsh: "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit" (John 15:2).

Hmm ... well, that doesn't sound encouraging. That sounds like if we aren't good enough if we don't produce enough, God cuts us off. He moves on without us. If what that sounds like is what happens, then none of us stand a chance at experiencing a life of connection with the Vine.

But if the Gardener simply cuts off every branch that bears no fruit, then it seems contradictory to what Jesus will go on to teach about the vine and the branches. Jesus promises that if we remain in him and stay connected with him, we will bear fruit (John 15:5). So how can Jesus say that God "cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit"? He seems to suggest that it's possible to be connected with the vine without bearing fruit and that if you're not bearing fruit, God has no use for you.

Is that how our relationship with God works? Does he cut off everyone who hasn't earned a certain number of gold stars?

Continued page 2.

Question and Answer –

Q: How do we know Peter was a rich fisherman?

A: by his net income.

Reminders**June 10th****Men's Bible Study – 8:00 a.m.****June 11th**

**Communion Sunday
10:30 a.m. – Single Board
Transition Question/Answer
Session**

June 14th

**Study with Pastor David - Noon
Praise Team - 5:00 p.m.
Choir – done until Fall**

June 15th**T.O.P.S. – 5:30 p.m.****June 18th**

**Methodist Men Monthly Breakfast
8:00 a.m. Fellowship Hall**

****Worship Assistants are needed
for June 18th & 25th**

**** Fellowship Volunteers needed
sign-up in Fellowship Hall**

The Second Sunday After Pentecost**June 11, 2023****Gardner Continued from page 1.**

Does he tolerate us as long as our production numbers are up and to the right, but if we begin to wither and don't bear enough fruit, he "cuts us off"?

Cut off or Picked Up

In Greek, the word for "cut off" is *airo*. It is a relatively common word in the New Testament, and it generally means something along the lines of "remove" or "lift." So it's reasonable to conclude, as the NIV does, that Jesus is talking about a gardener cutting off or "removing" the dying branches. If that's an accurate translation, then perhaps it's because God as Gardener is removing branches that have died but have yet to fall from the vine—like cutting down a tree that is dead but hasn't yet fallen.

At the same time, an equally valid translation is that God "picks up" or "lifts" the dying branches. The word *airo* appears twenty-six times in the gospel of John. Check out how it's used in John 5:8, where Jesus says to a paralyzed man, "Pick up your mat and walk." We see it again in John 8:59 where the religious leaders, who are furious with Jesus, "picked up stones to stone him."

Yes, it can refer to taking something away, but it can also refer to picking something up. So Jesus might be saying that God the Gardener "cuts off" dead branches, but he might also be saying that God "picks up" dying branches. Those are vastly different interpretations with two very different implications.

How we understand and define *airo* will determine how we connect with God when our way isn't working. When we become too much trouble or are too high-maintenance when we ignore what he has clearly said and disobey what he has told us, when we wither and struggle to produce good fruit, is God the kind of gardener who picks us up or cuts us off?

Many of us have lived lives of disconnection and have been resistant to seek reconnection with Jesus because we have a "cut you off" theology. We know what we have done and what we haven't done. We know a lot of gold stars are missing from our chart in heaven. If we were God, we know deep down what we would do with us. And so we assume rejection and keep our distance.

Continued page 5.

Question and Answer

Q: Why was Goliath so surprised when David hit him with a slingshot?

A: The thought had never entered his head before.

Volunteers Needed



LAST PERSON LEAVING
PLEASE TURN OUT LIGHTS
AND LOCK DOORS

First United Methodist Church
Please wear your name tag on Sunday mornings



Church Office Hours

**** Children & Jr.-Sr. High Sunday School finished until September 2023**

****NO Chancel Choir Until Fall** – Wednesdays, 6:45 p.m. Sunday 8:30 a.m.

The front door to the church will be unlocked during office hours and closed only for errands and lunch.

Monday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00
Tuesday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00
Wednesday
CLOSED
Thursday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00
Friday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00

Please continue to call in advance if you need in the church to make sure someone is in the office. If you reach the answering machine please leave your name, number, and a brief message and your call will be returned. Calls after 2:00 p.m. may be returned the next business day.



Who found a shekel within a fish's mouth?

- a) Elisha
- b) Jonah
- c) Elijah
- d) Peter

Abihu, Ithamar, Nadab, and Phinehas. Who is the odd one out?

- a) Abihu
- b) Ithamar
- c) Phinehas
- d) Nadab

Whose dead body revived a dead man?

- a) Moses
- b) Elijah
- c) Aaron
- d) Elisha

Check page 4 for answers from the previous week.

Birthdays and Anniversaries



11th – Henry Dunkeson
12th – Sharon Hall, Stephanie Howard
16th – Dustin Lambertsen, Steve & Jean Stribling

****See a wrong birthday or anniversary, or need one added, please call the office, or send an email to office@shen.church**

**Shenandoah First United
Methodist Church**

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Shenandoah, IA 51601

Phone 712-246-2081

Church E-mail
office@shen.church

Same address – a new look at
<https://shen.church>



<https://shenchurch.onechurchsoftware.com/>



United Methodist Church,
Shenandoah, IA

<https://www.facebook.com/methodist.church.shenandoah>



Services are now on our Youtube
channel only.

<https://www.youtube.com/@shen.church8192/streams>

***Prelude/Postlude/Accompanist: Terry Stafford**

Call to Worship

Leader: Sing praises to God with your voice.

People: Give thanks to the Lord with many instruments.

L: Sing to God a new song.

P: Sing a song throughout the whole earth.

L: God loves righteousness and justice.

P: God's love fills the whole earth.

L: All the earth honors the Lord.

P: We stand in awe of our God

“Calling Sinners”

Old Testament Reading:

New Testament Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

Songs

Standing on the Promises #374

In Christ Alone #3105

Trust and Obey #467

Last Week's Attendance

In-Person Worship - 52

Online Worship – 27

Our Mission:

“Know & Serve God by Sharing Christ's Love.”

Our Vision:

“We will grow in holiness, our community will thrive, & we will make a difference in our world.”

Answers for June 4th are c) Joseph a) Amaziah b) 2

Quiz s hints – Q1) Matthew Q2) None Q3) 2Kings

Gardener - Continued from page 2.

I wonder how often we've disconnected with God. We wrongly think we've been cut off and that he's done with us. We feel rejected and discarded, so we stop coming to church and we give up on praying. What's the point if God isn't going to respond to our messages? We assume we did something wrong or maybe we just didn't earn enough gold stars, but we convince ourselves that we've been cut off.

The Bible makes it clear. God is "slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" ([Exodus 34:6](#); [Psalm 103:8](#)) and will never leave us nor forsake us ([Deuteronomy 31:6](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#)). But when we think about what we have done or have not done, we tend to assume that God is a vengeful gardener with a machete in hand, ready to lop off any branch that isn't producing enough fruit. We try to be good enough to keep God from snapping, but we're not sure what the standard for "good enough" is. Thus we spend our lives oscillating between self-righteousness (because we think we've met the standard) and shame (because we're certain that we've fallen short).

I truly believe that God loves me, forgives me, and has saved me from my sin. I know that those things are true, but if I'm honest, I sometimes feel that God is frustrated with me. I feel like he barely tolerates me and if I don't start producing some serious fruit, he's going to cut me off.

You've felt that too? This subtle but malignant misunderstanding of God probably stems from a different place for every person.

It could be your hometown preacher who shouted about God's truth and whispered about God's grace.

It could be your ex who snuck out of the picture as soon as your personality became problematic, leaving you to feel as though loving you is a burden that no one can carry.

It could be that when you ran out of gas on the side of the road, you knew you had better not call your dad because when he shows up, he's going to be furious.

It could be the series of tragedies that plagued your life, causing you to question whether God was punishing you for not being good enough.

Ultimately, the real source of this is an enemy who wants to convince you that you have been ghosted by God and that he is going to cut you off.

A Visit to a Local Vineyard

Which is it? *Cut off or picked up?*

One of my favorite passages of Scripture is [Romans 8:38–39](#). Here the apostle Paul pushes back against the feeling that God has rejected us:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am not sure if Paul could state any more clearly that the love of God for us is unchangeable. Nothing can alter it. Not your wasted time, not your apathetic indifference, not your passive disobedience, not your divorce, not your addiction, not your affair, not your procrastination, not your bad habits, not your short temper, not your harsh words, not your biggest regret, not your blank gold-star-sticker chart—nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The definition of *airo* became even clearer to me when I spent some time one day walking with the owner of a local vineyard. I asked him questions about how he cared for the branches. Listening to him, and more importantly, watching him, gave me a clearer picture of God as the gardener.

He sees a branch that is connected with the vine but has no fruit on it. This branch is in the dirt, surrounded by weeds that are growing around it. It's withered and is struggling, but it's still connected with the vine. As long as it's connected with the vine, there is hope.

So, what does the gardener do? He gently picks it up and untangles it from the weeds. He cleans it off and tenderly intertwines it with some of the other branches so that it can be held up and restored. The gardener's goal is to *airo* withering branches so that their connection can be strengthened, and fruit can begin to grow.

When it's clear that your way hasn't worked for you and you find yourself covered in dirt and surrounded by weeds, there is a gardener with a graceful heart and gentle hands who longs to pick you up. As a once-withered branch myself, I'm immensely grateful for the kind of gardener God is. He saw me in the dirt, gently picked me up with graceful hands, cleaned me off, and placed me where I could grow and experience life once again.

A Branch in the Dirt

I was speaking at an event where I had the opportunity to meet a man, I'll call Adam. Adam shared with me that several years ago, he had spent some time in prison. He didn't say what he had been convicted of, and I didn't ask. When he went into prison, he was illiterate, unable to read or write. But another inmate, who was a Christian, offered to teach Adam to read by using the Bible.

This inmate spent hours and hours teaching Adam to read. Eventually, Adam not only learned to read about Jesus, but he became a follower of Jesus. Adam said that when he was released, he tried to get connected with a church in the small town where he lived. But people in the church found out about his background, and a number of them felt uncomfortable with him being there. They didn't think he belonged with the "healthy branches."

One prominent family—longtime members of the church who to all appearances had produced all kinds of fruit—finally told the pastor he would need to ask Adam to go, or they were going to leave. In their minds, it was time for Adam to officially be cut off. The pastor explained to this family that Jesus had come for people like Adam. The family ended up leaving, and others threatened to follow. Adam started thinking that maybe he had made too much of a mess of his life and that he ought to disconnect from God and the church.

One Sunday night after the sermon, the pastor asked Adam to come up front. Adam immediately knew what was going to happen. He was sure the pastor had found out about his crimes and was going to tell everyone—and then cut him off. He made his way to the front with his head down. He was so ashamed over what was about to happen. Some of the church members present at the service wanted Adam to leave, but they wished the pastor would just remove him quietly. It'd be less awkward that way.

When Adam reached the front, the pastor said he needed to talk to the church about a decision he had made. He explained that since being released, Adam had not been able to find work. The pastor said, "I brought Adam up here because I wanted to offer him a job. Adam, I'd like to hire you to help take care of the church facilities." And then the pastor put his hand in his pocket and pulled out an extra set of church keys and told Adam the keys were for him so he could open and close the church on Sundays.

As Adam is telling me his story, tears are running down his cheeks. He told me he had never had a key to anything his entire life. He felt loved and accepted. He felt picked up and connected. By the way, I should mention where I met Adam. I wasn't speaking at a prison; I was speaking at a pastors' conference. Adam had been handed the keys to the church six years earlier, and he's now a pastor at that church.

I don't know what you would do with you or what others would do with you, but I know what God wants to do with you. No matter how spiritually dry or dead you might feel, no matter how unproductive your life has been, no matter how long you've been lying in the dirt and caught up in the weeds, God the gracious gardener wants to gently pick you up and clean you off.

Adapted from When Your Way Isn't Working: Finding Purpose and Contentment through Deep Connection with Jesus by Kyle Idleman. HarperCollins Christian Publishing. NIV Weekly Blog, All Rights Reserved 501 Nelson Place, Nashville, TN 37214, USA, June 5, 2023.



A NEW KIND OF MISSION

This Sunday morning, we begin a new series called "A New Kind of Mission." We will be spending our time through the summer months in the Gospel of Matthew. This gospel was written as a way to bridge the gap between the former religious identities of Jesus' first disciples and the new reality, or the Kingdom of God, that he brought about. In our contemporary context, there is a gap

between our own religious identities and the culture around us. Perhaps this gospel still has something to say to us. I hope you'll join us.

Grace and peace, Pastor David B. Clark

