

God is Pruning Me

John 15:2

INTRODUCTION:

Five powerful statements every Christian can make:

1. God loves me.
2. God delivers me.
3. God sustains me.
4. God listens to me.
5. God prunes me?

Yes, that is true. Jesus said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:2). Purge means He “prunes it, or cleanses it by pruning.” Pruning is an important process in vineyards—some say it is the most important part of the entire operation. If a vinedresser is good at pruning, he can make the same vines produce much more fruit. If he is a poor pruner, the harvest will suffer. No one could have a better pruner than God.

After His Old Testament vineyard, Israel, disappointed Him, He asked, “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4). God is working on us today: “It is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). We are promised that He “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20). He is working on you and me to enable us to produce:

- “fruit” (John 15:2)
- “more fruit” (John 15:2)
- “much fruit” (John 15:8)

None of us has ever been “pruned” literally, so we lack a physical frame of reference for the spiritual process. We may have had our hair shorn against our will as children, or in a few cases scrubbed when we

resisted, but spiritual pruning feels unnatural and invasive. Let's consider the process from the perspective of the vine. How does a vine feel when being pruned?

“AHH”

The first feeling of the vine is a sense of relief. Pruning removes the dead wood that can breed disease and insects. It also makes the vine lighter and more attractive. God does this for us. In conversion, He removes from us our guilt and condemnation (Romans 8:1). In time, He cuts away the habits that bind us (1 Peter 2:11). Gradually, He trims our excesses and teaches us self-control (2 Peter 1:6).

God puts life back into people. Like an old photo left in the sun, the life of sin sooner or later loses its color . . . Like an iced drink left out too long, it goes flat . . . Like week-old bread, it gets stale . . . Like a game played too often, it loses its appeal. God prunes away the old to invigorate, freshen, revive, and renew our lives (Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 40:31).

When the long-missed prodigal returned, his father urged his older brother to accept him, reasoning, “It was meet [appropriate] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:32). Paul said in Ephesians 2:5 – “Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

The Father uses the Word to cleanse and refresh us. In this context, Jesus continued, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Paul wrote of the cleansing power of the Word in Ephesians 5:26-27 – “That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

To quote William Clark upon finally seeing the Pacific Ocean, “Oh, the joy” of Christianity!

- To **TIRED** people Christ says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28).

- To those **BURDENED BY SIN** and life's hardships, Jesus promises: Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (**Matthew 11:29-30**).
- To those who are **TROUBLED**, God has a good word: "And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed." (**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10**).
- To those who **FEEL LOST**, Jesus says He is "the way" (**John 14:6**).
- To those who **FEEL GUILTY**, He insists, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (**Romans 8:1**)
- To those who **FEAR DEATH**, Jesus assures: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (**1 Corinthians 15:52 -58**).

- To those who **FEAR THAT GOD HAS ABANDONED THEM**, He says, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you” (**Hebrews 13:5**). David added in **Psalms 37:25-28** - “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore.”
- To those who **FEEL THAT GOD IS ANGRY WITH THEM**, He has a comforting word: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (**Romans 5:1**).
- Those who feel God is inaccessible are told, “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (**Romans 5:2**).

“OUCH!”

The next step in pruning is to cut back the living vine so it will not waste its nutrients and moisture feeding vine instead of fruit. Left to itself, the vine produces abundant growth, but not all growth bears fruit. The vinedresser even cuts away whole bunches of grapes as they begin to form, if he feels more are growing than the root system can support. He wants both quantity and quality, and will not sacrifice quality for quantity. God also cuts away from us some things that hurt at times.

The pruner has four tools:

1. He uses his **fingers** to pinch off dead blooms.
2. He uses **clippers** for selective pruning and removing a spike or rogue shoot.
3. He uses **shears** to shape plants for a well-rounded appearance.
4. He uses a **saw** to cut heavy wood to restructure the plant.

Pruning helps us be more spiritual. When we came to Christ, many of us brought baggage from our old lives—old habits, attitudes, and ways of thinking about others and ourselves. The Vinedresser set to work cutting away anything that does not look like Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). As time progresses He chastens us to make us more fruitful

(Hebrews 12:1-11). Amy Carmichael wrote, “A wise master never wastes his servant’s time.” No matter what happens to us, God is not wasting our time . . . He is educating us . . . He is improving us . . . He is molding us.

There are some “mountain heights” of spirituality that can only be reached by going through the “valley of suffering” (**Psalm 119:71**). Hard times can build good character (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:7). Ralph Waldo Emerson was once approached by a concerned and inquiring person who said, “Mr. Emerson, they tell me that the world is coming to an end.” Emerson calmly replied, “Never mind, we can get along without it.” We all need to learn that we can “get along without” the world.

Suffering is an effective teacher in the school of life, and some lessons are only learned at her feet. This is why dedicated Christians often have to go through suffering. God uses the furnace of affliction—physical injury, disease, prolonged sickness, difficulty in rearing children or respecting parents, financial problems, or other overwhelming cares—to develop spirituality (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). **ILLUSTRATION:** A young woman was suffering greatly and confided her frustration to an older Christian friend: “If God loves me as you say He does, why did He make me so?” The older woman replied, “He is making you now. Listening friends . . . ” **God’s purpose is to prepare us for heaven.**

Pruning tests our faith (Genesis 22:1). It tells whether we are “gold, silver, precious stones” or “wood, hay, stubble” (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). The worthiness of the ship is not determined while it lies in the harbor but when it rides the waves of a storm. Our faith also must be tested during life’s storms.

ILLUSTRATION: During the Great Depression a good man lost his job, exhausted his savings, and forfeited his home. His grief was multiplied by the sudden death of his young wife. The only thing he had left was his faith. One day as he combed the neighborhood looking for work, he stopped to watch as men did stonework on a church building. One was skillfully chiseling a triangular piece of rock. Not seeing a spot it would fit, he asked, “Where are you going to put that?”

The man pointed toward the top of the building and said “See that little opening up there near the spire? That’s where it goes. **I’m shaping it down here so it will fit up there.**” Tears filled the hurting man’s eyes as he walked away thinking of the words: “**shaping it down here so it will fit up there.**” He found new meaning in his difficult situation. J. Sidlow Baxter wrote: “Behind a frowning providence God hides a smiling face.”

Pruning makes heaven more attractive to us (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1; Hebrews 11:10; Colossians 3: 1-2). Someone once observed: “It is through our tears that we see the farthest into heaven.” Perhaps Paul suffered more than any other New Testament Christian; he also seems to have been the most attracted to heaven. He said in **Philippians 1:21-23** – “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”

“WOW!”

If a vine’s branches could speak, they would eventually rejoice at how they look and how much fruit they could produce. Pruning hurts, but it also helps. We may not enjoy it, but we need it. At the time, it hurts when He removes something precious from us; but as the spiritual crop is produced, we see that the Father knew what He was doing. The end of the process produces a self-satisfied, “Wow!” like when the hair-stylist finishes and one sees how much better his or her appearance is.

The pruning process doesn’t just last for one day or a week or a year. We can never say, ‘Well, I’ve been through that, and I’m glad that’s over.’ The pruning process doesn’t happen all at once, or once for all . . . It takes a lifetime. The heavenly Vinedresser continually removes from us what hinders our productivity.

The greatest harm God could bring to us is to leave us alone. A child left to himself by his parents may soon appear dirty, ragged, and ill-mannered. His clothes will not match or be appropriate for the occasion. His hair may become long, dirty, or uncombed. **God accepts our immaturities at conversion but loves us too much to**

leave us that way (Hebrews 12: 10-11). He does not leave us to ourselves because we don't do well as spiritual orphans. Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (**Jeremiah 10:23**). The wise man said, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death" (**Proverbs 14:12**). God, through His Word, gives us

- Light in a **dark** world (Psalm 119:130).
- Understanding in a **wondering** world (Psalm 119:130).
- Knowledge in an **ignorant** world (Proverbs 2:6).
- Approval in a **rejecting** world (2 Timothy 2:15).
- Stability in a **floundering** world (James 1 :3-6).

I have read that domesticated bullfinches are placed in a dark room for weeks before learning to sing. When brought back into sunlight, their song is sweeter than it would otherwise be. By analogy . . . God takes us into the dark room of suffering so that when we come back into life's sunshine, our song of praise will be sweeter than ever before.

Listening friends . . . The Vinedresser knows what He is doing!

God's Plan for Man's Salvation