

Benevolent Pruning

I love spring! The weather is getting nicer, and everything outside is growing and blooming. I'm not exactly an expert, but I've learned a few things about gardening over the years, such as sometimes you have to practice tough love. You may need to cut down something that's hopelessly outgrown its space, sacrificing one plant for the greater good of the garden. The same idea applies to pruning. When I went out to tackle my fruit trees a few weeks ago, I was armed with clippers, loppers, and even a mini chainsaw, prepared to be severe where needed. For the good of the tree as a whole and for better fruit production, all dead wood, overcrowded branches, and shoots headed in the wrong direction had to go.

"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... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine... I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing... This is the Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:1-8

In Jesus' words above, the severest pruning falls on those who bear no fruit at all; they are lifeless because they don't abide in Him. But did you notice that even the abiding, fruit-bearing branches are not entirely spared? God, the ultimate gardener, loves us and desires that we should grow to achieve our full potential, that we should flourish and bear much fruit. To do that, we must stay connected to Jesus, our lifeline, but also allow God to judiciously prune away whatever is holding us back – deadwood, disease, even good things that are crowding out what's better – though it may be uncomfortable.

Fruit trees can survive without pruning, but they won't be as healthy or productive. The same is true of us. Do you want God's best for you? – to bring Him glory by bearing much fruit, fruit that will last? Then ask Him what needs to go. What bad habit, bad attitude, unhealthy relationship, or hobby-turned-obsession is keeping you from realizing your full God-given potential? What worldly busyness is hindering your essential, life-giving connection to Jesus? Don't just survive when, with God's benevolent "pruning," you can thrive.

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