



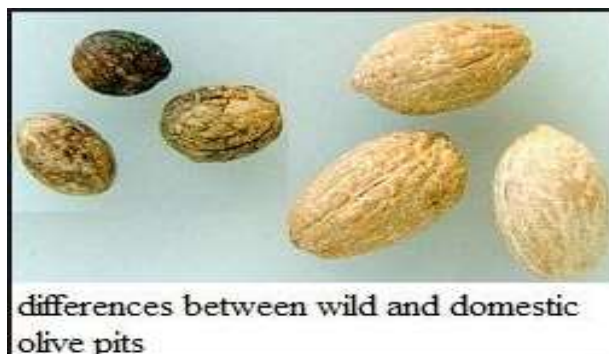
Gardens are awesome. They supply people with food. They help cultivate the environment. And they add beauty to the landscape. Did you know that The Body of Christ can be compared to a garden? A garden for God. Let's explore that concept.



Isaiah 58:11 The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

God has planted each of us in His Kingdom and planted His Kingdom in each of us. Most of us were once **WILD**, like wild olive trees.

Romans 11:17 *And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,*



Paul is spiritually speaking and comparing believers with olive trees. Notice the difference between the small, wild olive pit and the plump, cultivated pit. What does cultivate mean? Let's find out...

WEBSTER'S DEFINITION FOR CULTIVATE

1: to prepare or prepare and use for the raising of crops also : to loosen or break up the soil about (growing plants) 2a : to foster the growth of b : to improve by labor, care, or study : refine 3: further, encourage

Cultivating a garden takes a lot of work. We have to do plenty of this...



PRUNING and FERTILIZING.
Fertilizing a plant is when you give the plant extra nutrients to help it be strong. Pruning is when you cut away dead branches or leaves from the plant that may cause it harm. Pruning is also used to help guide the plant to grow in the most efficient, fruit producing way.

Using this example of fertilizing and pruning plants, let's read Matt 13:30.



Christ compares the Kingdom of God to a wheat field. Rather than focusing on the tares in this study, I'd like to focus on the fact that just like that wheat field, we may have some weeds growing in us and around us, that need to be dealt with.

MEDITATION MOMENT- *If we view ourselves as God's garden, how would you say that weeds begin to grow in us?*

Let's look at 3 common problems garden growers usually face. Each presents its own set of challenges and solutions. The first is "OVER FERTILIZING" ...



If we symbolically view ourselves as planted in God's Garden, where we all work to build ourselves and each other up, what would this represent?...

Encouragement without Correction.

MEDITATION MOMENT- How could each of the issues associated with over fertilizing be viewed spiritually?

The next problem in the Garden is "OVER PRUNING" ...



Pruning is important in training a plant in how it should grow. But too much shocks it. Keeping within the same spiritual concept, what would this be symbolically? ...

Correction without encouragement

Offering too much correction and not enough encouragement is even more damaging than no correction at all. Correction is important for our spiritual growth just like pruning is important for a plant's physical growth, but when done too often and without care or consideration, it only succeeds in harming the plant... and the person.

MEDITATION MOMENT- What are some ways we've experienced being "over pruned" by others? What are some ways we've been guilty ourselves of "over pruning" others?

Moving to our final problem in the Garden, there is "INFESTATION" ...



Infestation is caused by not paying close enough attention to the plant, especially after it's been damaged.

What can this symbolize?

MEDITATION MOMENT- Are there any "pests" in our own lives that are spiritually feeding on us and damaging the fruit we produce?

Now that we've seen some common problems that a garden faces, let's learn some proper "spiritual" gardening techniques from the Bible...

FERTILIZING THE PLANT= ENCOURAGING THE PERSON

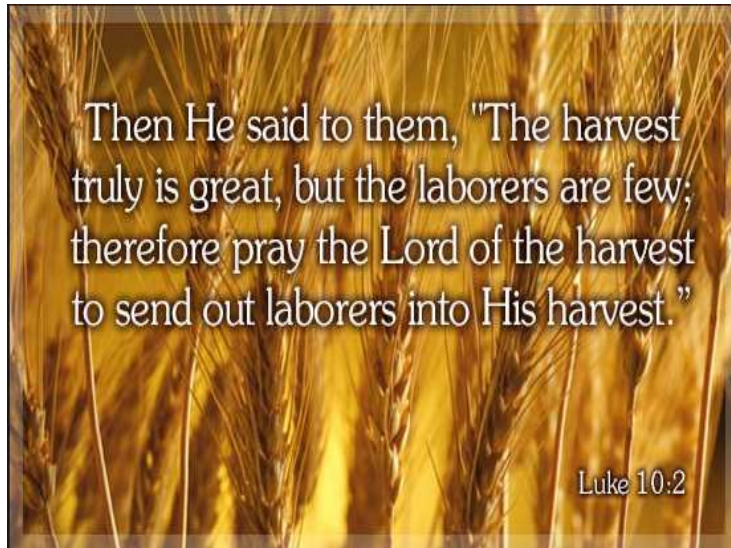
1 Thessalonians 5:11 *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*

Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,*

Hebrews 3:13 *But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

Each of us have a different purpose and can produce different fruit, so God uses each of us to prune and fertilize each other.

Even though we are God's Garden, we are also the laborers in His garden.



Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Luke 10:2

The way we labor for God is very important. The way we encourage is very important, and the way we correct is very important. Again, Correction without encouragement is more damaging than encouragement without correction. Our next technique is proper pruning.

PRUNING AND WEEDING THE PLANT = CORRECTING THE PERSON

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

1 Timothy 5:20 Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

2 Timothy 2:25-26 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

From these verses, we learn to be led by the Spirit when we correct someone, that way we do it how and when He wants. Have you ever considered that the **same thing applies to encouraging someone?**... I've never heard anyone say "make sure God is the one leading you to encourage that person," but shouldn't our encouragement ALSO be led by Holy Spirit? If it isn't God that leads us to encourage, we may be helping someone harm themselves spiritually.

To be honest, I think the current state of the global church comes from too much fertilizing and not enough pruning. As a whole, Christianity has begun to grow away from CHRIST and His Word. We have rebellious roots and bad branches that are pulling us away from the presence of God. But it's not too late for us to return to our proper position and be in His prosperous presence.



So above all, let's make sure we are planted in God. Weeds will try to strangle us, spiritual parasites will try to devour us, but as long as we stay in God's will, those weeds and parasites will be destroyed and we'll continue to bear fat and flourishing fruit for as long as we live. Amen.