

Day Fourteen: Pruning

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.

Jn 15:2

It is true that the Father will ask more and more of us to reduce us to love. We prune vines, cut off branches that are not bearing fruit, to bring forth more fruit. A live, fruit-bearing branch is not free from this cutting away. Fruitfulness is the goal that guides the gardener's every decision. Not only will a good gardener prune the vine by sawing off branches that are not bearing fruit, but he will also cut off fruit-bearing branches so that more fruit will come from the vine.

As a son/daughter of the Father, you are called to place your life and your marriage into the hands of a skilled Gardener who will look at your life to determine how to bring the most yield of fruit from your marriage. What is that fruit? It is love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Which of these fruits do you see as having an abundance in your marriage, a good yield? Is there any fruit that you need more of? If you see fecundity or need, how much more clearly the Father sees, and because He is a skilled Gardener, you can trust Him with His pruning.

Part of what you perceive as difficulties or problems in your marriage are areas where the Father wants to cut and remove. For this, our hearts need to be in a place of gratitude. Instead of resisting by grumbling and complaining, you can choose to trust, and in your trusting of the Father's wisdom, you will grow in gratitude for whatever He is removing. When you give thanks to the Father, your trust will grow; when your trust grows, the Father will see it and will bless you. When you are aware of a difficulty or a removal, no matter the pain, train yourself to say, *"Thank you, Father!"* This is probably not your response in situations like this. Your first response, usually, is to want things to change so that they are more comfortable for you. The more you can respond with gratitude, the more quickly you will grow in grace, bringing more life to you and your marriage. Grumbling and complaining will only keep you trapped in a reality that you do not want, leaving you without peace and joy. How you act at the beginning of a trial is one of the greatest determiners of the direction you will go based on the strain that is placed on you.

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Pruning might be your Father exposing sin, sin that needs to be removed, but with which you have become complacent. Your Father will do what is needed to destroy sin in your life, for the sin is standing in the way of the blessings He longs to give to you. Every sin for which you make excuses is a sin that is affecting your marriage. Our vision can be so myopic that we cannot see the damage it brings to ourselves and our marriage. No sin is hidden, personal to just you. Your life is either bringing forth the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness, and that light or darkness is the environment in which your marriage exists. You can make excuses, cover it up, or just dismiss your sin as not that big of a deal, but it is. It is the fruit that is being eaten in your home that you brought to the table, and it will give life or death. Ask the Father to lop off the non-fruit-bearing branch of sin.

Maybe your spouse points something out to you, and they do so in a not-so-gentle way. You are hurt. You have a choice to make. Hurt is one of the major triggers of anger, but it can also help us see where we need healing. We can attack our spouse in return, or we can go to the Father and ask, *"What is the lie I have come to believe about myself that the Holy Spirit wants to surface?"* It is then that you can be healed, set free from seeing things as an attack that has no life in it, or you can see the attack as an opportunity to know your wound, turning to the Father's hands that He might cut it off so that the fruit of (I wonder what fruit it will be?) might come forth. This is the power of wisdom. The flesh perceives that there is only an attack at hand. Wisdom asks why I am being hurt by this. By the way, don't forget that fear and frustration also stir the desire to see our spouse as the enemy who needs to be attacked or avoided.

When we are honest with ourselves, the defenses come down. We see ourselves and the effect we have on our spouse and others. It is sad when a soul is so self-impressed as to hide behind excuses rather than simply admit the truth, apologize, and ask for forgiveness. Your pricked conscious is the Holy Spirit stirring you to be uncomfortable so that you see the need for change, hopefully then realizing

- 1) I can't
- 2) God can
- 3) I will let him.

Even though the branch is dead, the vine will try to bring it back to life. This is truly a waste of energy for the vine. There are parts of ourselves that simply need, in compassion, to receive a death-blow so that the dead may be removed and burnt.

Note: This does not excuse the attitudes and actions of your spouse that are hurtful. When you experience this, wake up and see who you are and what you can do to be the

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spouse they need. Cover their shame and pray blessings upon them, while at the same time not suppressing your thoughts or feelings, but establishing clear boundaries. Take your thoughts and feelings to your Father, and with an honest heart, tell Him the truth of what you experienced, giving it into the hands of your loving Father, asking Him to heal you. I wonder what life would be like if we did this; I wonder what our marriage would be like if we turned the offence against us into an opportunity to see the lie we believe, keeping us from life?

Where there is more fruit, there is more seed. Your life is for a purpose much bigger than yourself, if you allow it to be so. You might have children. You are being pruned to be able to love them more deeply, find more joy and peace in your relationship with them, and relate with more patience, kindness, generosity, and faithfulness, then given gentleness and self-control when your relationship is facing stress. This is the seed that you get to offer to others that will come forth from allowing yourself to be pruned.

You probably have a tendency to believe that pruning is focused, alone, on the dead branches. Pruning focuses the vine's energy to promote more life. Too many branches make for too much dispersion of the energy of life. Cutting back on fruit-bearing branches allows for more fruit. When you are not a gardener, this might not make sense. The Father is wise. He asks you to trust Him. The expression of trust in the midst of pruning is to say thank you. When He is pruning your healthy branches, He is doing that which you would not. Wow! Now, that is being a good Father. Often, our lives are filled with so much good that we miss the greater good. This can happen when the marriage bears fruit in the form of children. Life can become so busy doing this or that for your children that your marriage takes a back seat, rather than being the primary relationship. Your life is filled with your children's good, but the good of your marriage falls by the wayside. If this is your case, repent and put your marriage back at the center. This is subtle and dangerous. We think of our children's futures, hoping their activities will bring them scholarships. We feel they are receiving less if they have not extra activities, with life becoming an affair of running from here to there for their sake, with all that time leaving less time for family time, but even more insidious is that there is less time for you to be a good husband or a good wife because you are focused on being a good parent. This is not to say that you are to set a new goal of being a bad parent. This is a challenge to keep your marriage, your Sacrament, at the center of all you do, your children eating the fruit of mom and dad's sacrificial love for each other, with their abundant love spilling over to the children.

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What “good” needs to be pruned away so that there might be more fruit? There can be many sacred cows whose throats the knife needs to be taken. Working out, with all its goodness and justification, might need to have the saw of pruning applied to it. Hobbies can also be a good, but they can stand in the way of the greater good, your Sacrament. Your marriage is your source of life in the household. Make sure to truly believe this in the way you invest the limited resources of yourself that you have.

By the way, you can either remove that which inhibits the free flow of God's life in and through your marriage, or He, being a good Father, will do it.

Father of all wisdom,
You know better than I.
There are areas of my life and our marriage that need pruning.
I give you permission to do so.

Holy Spirit, my Helper.
When the Father prunes an area of my life,
I need you to come to my aid to train my heart to say, “Thank you!”

Not only remove the branches from my life and our marriage that are not bearing fruit,
but remove the good branches so that there might be even more fruit.
I can't wait to see the good, the life you are going to bring forth.
Thank you, even before you bring it about by your pruning hand.
In Jesus name. Amen.