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Fruitfulness Explained: How Does God Help Us Grow



Part 38 (041024AM)

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Most of us long to have something from our earthly existence -- that will endure.

Life is so fragile, time is so fleeting, and things are so temporal.

What are you involved with that is bigger than you? What are you doing that will last forever? What are you seeking that is eternal? That is exactly the depth of consideration God wants us to live at—thinking of how we can allow Him to grow us into an enduring, fruitful, rewarded saint!

Fall is here; soon winter will kill the plants that have surrounded our deck with reminders of God's beautiful creation. Some of those plants are just too precious to let go—so I have started my fall preparations to bring some herbs indoors.

I examine each one, cutting off the weak, sickly, or gangly growth. I trim it down to optimal growing size and shape. Some I repot to smaller pots, others I combine. After a few more weeks outside they should last until the spring, bringing their fragrances and flavors into our home.

What I just described to you is pruning. The result is increased fruitfulness for my herbs. As we open to John 15 this morning we are asking the Lord to show us how **HE** works to make us **GROW**. The process is very similar. Our Heavenly Father has two choices as He looks at our lives.

He can **prune us**. Pruning is a positive step of refocusing, redirecting, and renewing that makes us healthier, and more fruitful.

Or He can **chasten us**. Chastening is a negative step of drastic intervention taken by God to prevent us from further damaging ourselves by sinful choices we have made in our lives.

Remember when we started this John 15 study? We were allowing Jesus to Explain Fruitfulness to us in this wonderful passage. We saw that Our Father the Vinedresser is here. He is looking at us. If we are cast down in the mud of sin **He chastens us** and spiritually lifts us back up into the sunlight of fellowship. If we are flourishing with external growth but not producing much fruit (by His control of our time, our talents, our attitudes, and our actions) **He prunes us** by cutting away at our rambling growth until we bear more fruit.

PROFILES IN PRUNING. In the vineyard, an expert pruner applies his skills in four specific ways. **1** . Farmers cut anything dead or dying off the vines, **2**. Farmers try to expose every branch to the light so that it gets maximum exposure to the sunlight, **3**. Farmers prune unnecessary growth so that the vine concentrates on fruit production, **4**. Farmers keep the soil around the roots clear and prepared to feed the fruit production needs of the plant.

"Does God have a grudge against His children? Is He trying to "get even" with us? Is God's chastening and pruning a kind of parental revenge for childish wrongdoing? Often we may think so, but this is far from the truth. God disciplines us for our own profit so we can share in His holiness. God's one supreme purpose in disciplining us is purification. He wants to take away from us all that mars the likeness of Jesus Christ within us. It is His own holiness that He wants to perfect in us".

TRUTH NUMBER 1: Jesus Never Neglects Any Vine That He Owns

If you are in Christ He is at work somewhere in your life – trimming, lifting, cleaning, or pruning. Whenever we have fruitless times, God steps in to change that.

For Jesus

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"For the Christian, sin is like dirt covering the grape leaves. Air and light can't get in. The branch languishes, and no fruit develops. How does our Vinedresser lift us from mud and misery? How does He move our branch from barren to beautiful so we can start filling up our basket? The answer to this question is the first secret of the vine. It's All Up to You, once believers understand God's motive in discipline, an astonishing truth dawns: **The discipline doesn't have to continue! It's all up to me. I will only experience pain as long as I hang on to my sin**. If you're still wondering whether you are in a season of discipline, ask yourself this question: **Can I look back over my walk with God and see very clearly that a sinful behavior I used to be caught up in is no longer an issue? Are there thoughts, attitudes, or habits that used to dominate my life but don't anymore?** If you can answer yes, you're moving forward and upward with God. If you can't, your grape harvest basket is probably empty and you are undoubtedly being disciplined. I recommend that you now try to understand what degree of discipline God might be using to get your attention. Note Hebrews 12 with me. There are stages of God's chastening in a believer's life."

Stage 1: Rebuke – "My son, do not...be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him" (v.5). We hear God's rebuke, even though we don't always choose to respond. God can make Himself heard in many ways: a prick of our conscience, a timely word from another person, a Scripture, the preaching of God's Word, or conviction by the Holy Spirit. (Do you see how wonderful and kind it is of God to use so many methods to get our attention and steer us away from peril?)

Stage 2: Chasten – "For whom the Lord loves He chastens" (v. 5). In other places in the Bible, the word **chastening** is used interchangeably with discipline. But in here in Hebrews 12 is it used in of a much more serious degree of discipline.

Chastening is something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy now doesn't. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finance. Many Christians bump along in this level of discipline, yet fail to read the signs. They feel unfulfilled at church, critical of their Christian friends, and "on the outs" with God. When they pick up their Bible, it feels like a lead weight instead of a welcome relief. Their relationship with the Lord seems blighted by a sadness or lethargy they can't quite trace.

If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you don't need to go to church more or try to read your Bible with a better attitude. You need to look for ongoing sin in your life, the dirt crusting over your leaves and cutting you off from God's best. If you don't respond, love will compel your Father to take more drastic measures.

Stage 3: Scourge- "And scourges every son whom He receives" (v. 6). To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It's the same word the Gospels use to describe what the Romans did to Jesus just before they crucified Him. Not a pretty picture! In fact, for the word **scourge** you could substitute **cause-excruciating pain**. What percentage of Christians do you think have experienced scourging? It may shock you to read that God scourges "every son." That means you have most likely already been scourge in your life.

TRUTH NUMBER 2: Jesus Wants My Desires to Become His Desires

What is the Lord trying to accomplish by this pruning/cleansing and chastening/scourging? It is actually quite simple. Our Father in Heaven wants my Desires to become His Desires. So how do I get Him in control and me out of the driver's seat of life? Here are some simple but powerful items to sign over to Him at closing.

1. **My Desires need to become His Desires**. [Luke 22:42](#) saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." NKJV
2. **My Pleasure needs get surrendered to His Pleasures planned for me "at His right Hand"**. [Psalm 16:11](#) You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. NKJV
3. **My Happiness is supplied by His Happiness welling up within me by His Spirit.** [Romans 5:1-5](#) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. NKJV

So God wants to know – do you want to grow? Do you want something that outlasts yourself, is bigger than you, and will last forever? That is what your Heavenly Father the Gardener is at work to do in your life today.

Remember, if you have Christ – what else do I really need?

From the paragraph entitled "Purification" in Chastening, a booklet by James H. McConkey.

Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 39-48.

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