

## The Work of the Vinedresser

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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 15:1-2).*

Parents want their children to live productive lives. So does our Father in heaven. Once we become His children, He works to accomplish His will in our lives. When the Vinedresser notices that any branch is not producing fruit, He goes to work to remedy that. Although many translations say "takes away" in verse two of John 15, a clearer translation of the Greek word *airo* would be to "take up" or "lift up." This same word - *airo* - is used in Matthew 14:20 when the disciples "took up twelve baskets of food;" in John 4:11, "in their hands bear thee up;" in John 5:8, "Take up thy bed and walk;" and John 11:41, when "Jesus...lifted up His eyes."

New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground, but they don't bear fruit there. Their leaves get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless. The vinedresser goes through the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches. After he lifts them up, washes them off and wraps them around a trellis, the branches begin to thrive.

That's the way of our Father. In loving kindness, He lifts us up from the grime of living too close to the ground.

If a branch is bearing some fruit, the Vinedresser prunes it or trims it up so that it will bear more fruit. If you suspect you are being pruned, examine yourself and acknowledge that God is trying to get your attention. Trust that since a loving parent would tell a child why he or she is receiving correction, your loving Father will do no less. If sin is the problem, repent and turn around. If you conclude that you're being pruned, ask God to show you clearly what He wants you to let go of, and trust Him enough to release it.

Mature pruning is expressed in the Bible as the testing of your faith. *Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:3-4). In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6-9).*

*"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). Jesus told Peter when he said, "Lord, wash not only my feet, but my head and my hands," "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean, and you are clean, but not all of you" (John 13:10). Those whom Jesus loves, He continues to wash their feet, whom the Lord loves He chastens...Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:5-6, 11).*

Tony Dickerson of the Royal Horticultural Society says, "While decorative vines require minimal fuss, those for fruit are more demanding and require careful pruning if they are to be usefully productive."

Karen Cutler, author of *The New England Gardener's Book of Lists* and editor of gardening handbooks, says "the general goal when pruning vines is to keep them healthy, vigorous and productive...to keep a vigorous climber healthy, you must do the following." I added my comments in brackets.

- Remove any dead, damaged, diseased or unproductive stems. [God will gently remove anything in our lives that is not our best. It may be a diseased way of thinking (harboring bitterness, etc.) or something we carried over from our life before Christ which is damaging our witness, or an unproductive habit. Is there anything you have been holding onto that you suspect God is trying to trim away?]
- Remove overly tangled stems. [God will continually remind us that we are in the world, but not of it. Put first the kingdom of God. Are you the same on Monday as you are on Sunday?]
- Remove errant stems, especially those growing away from the support. [God will always work to bring us back to Himself. In the case of the prodigal son, he needed discipline as a son, but he was still a son and the father was watching continually for his return. If we are truly interested in bearing fruit for God, He may prune us by pulling us back before we go to the "far land." Christians struggle against good, better and best. Are you achieving God perfect plan for your life or are you just doing good things?]
- Direct its growth. [This may be one of the primary reasons for being pruned: God's loving hand is directing us to be all He created us to be. When we think of God's love and care for us, we visualize our comfortable place where we *lie down in green pastures* (Psalm 23:2) and *dwell in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty* (Psalm 91:1-2). Even the most adventurous of us do not invite the pruning of the Vinedresser. Yet pruning is one of the primary ways He expresses His love to us.]

As children of the King, we have our inheritance secure. We will live with Him forever, but because He loves us so much, He wants us to have something to bring with us when we enter the gates of heaven. If it were not God's purpose for His children to bear fruit, He would probably have taken us to our final home as soon as we were born into His family.

*"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you (John 15:16).*

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