

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes [**lifts up**] every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he **prunes** to make it bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2 NRSV)*

Most Bible versions mistranslate this word in the Greek for remove. The original word literally means to lift up, not remove or take away. Jesus was using the analogy of a grapevine branch found laying on the ground in the mud. While laying in the mud a branch cannot bear fruit, but if it is rescued and propped up off the ground it can restore its capacity to begin bearing fruit again.

*But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

This is how God relates to followers of Jesus who are bearing hardly any fruit of the Spirit in their lives. If they keep choosing to remain connected to the vine stalk yet are not producing genuine fruit in their lives, it is likely because they are too caught up in the thinking and distractions of this world, too immersed in the dirt around them, too obsessed with focusing on the negative and in need of having their imagination lifted up out of the darkness and redirected to the Light of this world.

*Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "**I am the light** of the world. He who **follows me** will not walk in the darkness, but will **have the light of life**." (John 8:12)*

*I must **work the works of him who sent me**, while it is day. The night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, **I am the light** of the world. (John 9:4-5)*

*This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that **God is light**, and in him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

This is a dangerous condition to remain in, for unless such a one makes a determined choice to cooperate with the pruning work of the Spirit in their heart and mind, they will be ill-prepared for the crisis and troubles that everyone is sure to encounter.

*What was sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the **cares of this age** and the **deceitfulness of riches** choke the word, and he **becomes unfruitful**. (Matthew 13:22)*

*and the **cares of this age**, and the **deceitfulness of riches**, and the **lusts of other things** entering in **choke the word**, and it **becomes unfruitful**. (Mark 4:19)*

Notice the centrality of the word here. And keep in mind that Jesus Himself is the authentic Word. But Jesus will never force Himself on anyone. Jesus invites, attracts, urges, warns and identifies with us. But without choices made on our part to participate in the invitation of Christ to enter into an intimate experience of willing vulnerability with Him, we can fall short of entering into His kingdom.

*And how will they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "**How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!**" But they didn't all listen to the glad news. For Isaiah says, "**Lord, who has believed our report?**" So **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**. (Romans 10:15-17)*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made. **In him was life**, and **the life was the light** of men. **The light shines in the darkness**, and the darkness hasn't overcome it. (John 1:1-5)*

*Without **faith** it is **impossible to be well pleasing** to him, for he who comes to God **must believe** that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

These explanations by Jesus are crucial to take seriously if we want to thrive in the body of Christ, the family of heaven. It is not enough to simply believe facts regarding the goodness, kindness, forgiveness of God if those facts are not allowed to transform the heart and lead us to enter into the reality of truth. In any intimate relationship with anyone it is essential that both are participating, both are willingly choosing to become vulnerable and authentic with each other. The same is true with our relationship with God, and unless we make the choice to get real, honest, raw and truthful with God, it is impossible to live in a pleasing relationship of trust and mutual love with Him.

But when we choose to get serious and allow the truth of His character of pure love and life to have access to both our mind and our heart, His light can heal, transform, purify and polish us so that we too become reflectors of the glorious light of God's love as we dwell in Christ as our only Source of identity and truth.

***You are the light** of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. (Matthew 5:14)*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is **liberty**. But we all, with unveiled face **beholding as in a mirror the glory** of the Lord, are **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)*

*Jesus therefore said to them, "Yet a little while **the light is with you**. **Walk while you have the light**, that darkness doesn't overtake you. He who walks in the darkness doesn't know where he is going. While you have the light, **believe in the light**, that **you may become children of light**." (John 12:35-36)*

This is truly how God deals with followers who are not bearing fruit. But what about those who are?

*Every branch that bears fruit he **prunes** to make it **bear more fruit**.*

What is involved in pruning? **What needs to be pruned?**

Today we see a ramping up of distractions of every kind possible. Advertising, entertainment, social media, philosophies, theories of every kind and world events in the news all compete for our attention to occupy our imagination. When we realize that our imagination is the sacred part of us that is literally where our faith originates and is what is needed for the Holy Spirit to communicate to us effectively, we can understand why pruning is essential for anyone desiring to participate in bearing fruit in God's kingdom. It is in our imagination where random thoughts stimulate us towards rabbit trails of different thoughts and feelings fueled by assumptions causing distraction, confusion and doubt and unbelief. Even discussions with others usually contain many 'tendrils' with potential to move our imagination in a divergent direction from the main focus.

Examine this list of passages that relate to God's pruning work in our lives. Take time to identify **specific things** the Spirit wants to **remove** from us that threaten to undermine the work of His grace in our hearts. Note also the means and **methods** God may use to prune and purify our thinking and transform our spirit.

Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts. You teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness, That the bones which you have broken may rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all of my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Don't throw me from your presence, and don't take your holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways. Sinners shall be converted to you. (Psalms 51:6-13)

But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap; and he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings in righteousness. (Malachi 3:2-3)

Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom we also have our access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only this, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope: and hope doesn't disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we don't faint. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:1-2)

For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

As I urged you when I was going into Macedonia, stay at Ephesus that you might charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine, neither to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which cause disputes, rather than God's stewardship, which is in faith-- but the end of the charge is love, out of a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith; from which things some, having missed the mark, have turned aside to vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor about what they strongly affirm. (1 Timothy 1:3-7)

holding faith and a good conscience; which some having thrust away made a shipwreck concerning the faith; (1 Timothy 1:19)

*To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are **defiled** and **unbelieving**, nothing is pure; but both their **mind** and their **conscience are defiled**. They **profess that they know God**, but by their works they deny him, being **abominable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work**. (Titus 1:15-16)*

***looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory** of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might **redeem us from all iniquity**, and **purify for himself a people** for his own possession, **zealous for good works**. (Titus 2:13-14)*

*For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling **those who have been defiled**, sanctify to the cleanness of the flesh: how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works** to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13-14)*

*Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good**, in order **that we may share his holiness**. Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it **yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it. See to it that no one fails to obtain the **grace of God**; that **no root of bitterness** springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled. (Hebrews 12:9-11, 15 NRSV)*

***As many as I love, I reprove and chasten**. Be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)*

Keep in mind that the fruit God is looking to find on the branches is never something the branch is expected to produce itself, but is a result of the branch both remaining connected to the vine stalk as well as cooperating with the work of the Vinedresser's pruning in their lives. Fruit does not make the vine; the vine empowers fruit production by giving life and nourishment to the branches.

***Remain in me, and I in you**. As the branch **can't bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine**, so neither can you, unless you **remain in me**. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same **bears much fruit**, for apart from me you can do nothing. In this is my **Father glorified, that you bear much fruit**; and so you will **be my disciples**. (John 15:4-5, 8)*