

PRUNING THE BRANCHES

*“Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it.”
—ISAIAH 27:2-3*

In Scripture the image of a vineyard presents a consistent picture throughout the Old and New Testaments. The vineyard owner is God, and He cares for his vineyard. Isaiah 5:7 says, “The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.”

In the New Testament, Jesus tells several parables about a vineyard and they are all about Israel being the vineyard. Within the vineyard, there is a true vine, and this is a picture of Christ. Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

The picture moves from God who owns and plants the vineyard, which is Israel corporately, and narrows down to the one true vine who is Christ, and then to the branches. As Christians, we are the branches. What God was looking for as fruit in Israel was evidence of His own character; His goodness, compassion, justice, holiness. The source of displaying God’s character is God, Himself, and when there is a breakdown in relationship with Him, there is a breakdown in character.

Fruitlessness derives from only one thing – we have become detached from the vine. In John 15:1-2, Jesus tells us, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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.” Pruning forces the vine to put more of its energy into the fruit. If we are not pruned, we can be full of foliage, looking lush and beautiful, but bear little fruit.

Our disobedience to God can leave us just barely clinging to the vine. In His wisdom, God will take disciplinary action, sometimes leading us into difficult situations in order to prune us. Hebrews 12:5-6 says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as a son.” God’s discipline is designed to bring us back into dependence on Him, so that the fruit of the Holy Spirit becomes evident in our lives.

There is a superficial understanding which says God’s role is to take us out of difficulties, but they are often a gift of God that produces something far richer than our comfort. It’s His character revealed in us, which gets us back on track, connects us firmly to the vine, and empowers us to become branches that produce fruit.

PRAYER: Dear Father, I am grateful for difficult times that have brought me into a fresh dependency on You. Keep me on track, Lord, so that I can produce fruit for You.

TO REFLECT UPON: Have difficult times brought me back to the Lord with renewed faith in Him?