

The Process of Pruning



The Vine and the Branches (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you precious insights out of Scripture that have made the difference between success and failure in my life, and can do the same in yours.

Our theme for this week is: The Vine and the Branches, a theme which provides us with a beautiful, scriptural picture of the relationship that we can have with God through Jesus Christ.

In my previous talks I've interpreted the main features of this parable as follows: the Vine is Jesus, Himself; the sap or the life that flows from the root through the trunk into the branches, that divine eternal life is the Holy Spirit; then the gardener or the owner of the whole vineyard or the whole estate is God the Father. So you see, we have a complete revelation of the three persons of the Godhead in the simple picture of the vine. The vine is Jesus, the sap is the Holy Spirit, the owner, the gardener is the Father. Then the fourth element in the picture is the branches. Jesus says to His disciples, "You are the branches." So the branches are the true disciples or the real Christians. Sometimes we wonder who are the real Christians. Is it this denomination or that denomination or the people who go to that church or this church or believe this way or that way? The answer is very simple, the real Christians are the branches that remain in the vine, Jesus Christ.

God's main objective emphasized throughout the parable is fruit. And I've pointed out that fruit comes in our lives in two main forms. First the fruit of character, the fruit of the Spirit, which is primarily love and then those graces of character that go along with love. And secondly the fruit of other believers won to the Lord through our lives. The evidence that we are bearing fruit that has seed in it, is that other believers come to the Lord out of our lives. Other trees grow up out of the seed that's in our fruit.

One great basic condition for bearing fruit is stated emphatically by Jesus: it's remaining or abiding in Him. And this in turn depends on two simple things; first holding fast His Word, and second obeying His commands. He, Himself guarantees us that if we will hold fast His words and obey His commands, we will abide in Him and if we abide in Him we shall bear much fruit.

In my talk today I'm going to deal with another important aspect of this theme, one that's little understood by many Christians, that is, the process of pruning. The true care of vines involves pruning. Now I have to confess right at the beginning if anybody's listening who is an expert, that I am no expert, that I only know certain simple principles. But I believe those are enough. This is what Jesus says about pruning in John 15:2:

> "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit."

Now, that's the translation of the New American Standard Bible. The New International Version says, "...He trims it clean..." More literally the Greek word means, "He cleanses it." However, the process undoubtedly is that which we today call pruning. And it's related, incidentally the Greek word for cleansing or pruning is related to the Greek word for "taking away." I can't explain this to people who don't know Greek, but it's like there's two options. Either he takes it away, one form of the verb, or He prunes it, cleanses it, the other form of the verb. So in a sense, we're all faced with these two options, either to be pruned, to be cleansed, or to be taken away.

Now, in understanding the nature of pruning, we have to observe a very important distinction which many Christians do not make. The distinction is between two different ways in which God may deal with us. The first is the way of correction or punishment which comes for doing wrong, and removing that which is bad. But that's not pruning. The second way is pruning. The essence of pruning is cutting away good fruit to make way for better fruit. Many, many Christians don't understand this process of pruning. If God cuts anything away, they always get the impression that they are being judged for wrong doing. And they begin to cry out to God and say, "What have I done wrong?" God's answer is, "You've done nothing wrong. You've been bearing fruit, that's why I'm pruning you."

I remember in a congregation which I pastored once, I asked if anybody had any testimonies about how God had been pruning their lives. And a very fine young man, who is still a friend of mine today although he is no longer a young man, stood up and he gave testimony how he had been delivered from a particular sin. Well, as I meditated on that afterward I thought, "He got the idea wrong." Pruning is not dealing with sin. Pruning is removing good fruit in order to bring forth better fruit.

Now, this is very important because the agents are different. God's human servants in the church are required to administer correction or discipline. In 1 Timothy 5:20, Paul says to Timothy:

> "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning."

And in Titus 1:12-13, he says something similar to Titus, speaking about the people of Crete.

> "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' [Paul goes on:] This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith."

So, we see that it is the responsibility of pastors and God's servants in the church to rebuke and to reprove those who do wrong that they may cease doing wrong and start to do good. But, and here's a very important principle, Jesus is very emphatic in this parable, He says, "My Father does the pruning." How important it is we understand that. Pruning is a very delicate operation. It requires experience, it requires skill, it requires a knowledge of how the branch ultimately should grow to bring forth the most possible fruit. An unskilled person who attempts to prune will be a disaster. So, Jesus emphasizes it. I want to emphasize to you, only God, the Father, has the knowledge and skill needed for pruning, because this requires supernatural insight into the divine plan and the end purpose for each life. Only God the Father knows how each particular branch should end up. Without that knowledge, if anybody else attempts to prune, they may do more harm than good.

This relates in a very important way to our own personal experience. We have to learn to distinguish between being disciplined and being pruned. As I've already said, discipline comes because we have done wrong, but pruning comes because we have been bearing fruit. It consists of cutting away good fruit to make way for better fruit.

All fruit-bearing Christians ultimately will be subjected to the Father's pruning, but many do not know how to respond. I've dealt with so many along this line, that is why I am taking time to deal with it in this talk. I've met people who've said, "Well, everything seems to be going wrong in my life. I used to have a successful ministry and now it's dried up. I used to lead a successful home prayer group and now it's ended. I used to be able to preach in the streets and people were saved. And now there's nothing. What's wrong? What have I done wrong?" And it's always such a delight and also a rather amusing experience to be able to say to them, "Listen! You haven't done anything wrong. It's not because you were disobedient. It's not because you sinned. It's just the

opposite. It's because you've been bearing fruit. God is pruning away that fruit because He knows you're capable of better fruit. But the better fruit will not come until you've allowed Him, first of all, to deal with the good fruit."

You see, there is a saying: "the good is the enemy of the best." That really can be true in the Christian life. We can have a certain ministry. Be so excited and thrilled about it. We think this is wonderful. And wonderful it is. But God the Father who knows our true inner potential and capacity says, "That's good, but I want the best." And so in His own sovereign way He removes that which is good and replaces it in due course with that which is best. But in the mean time, we are there like a trimmed branch, we seem to have nothing, we're stripped. I've had the privilege of being close friends of multitudes of wonderful Christians. I don't know a single fruit-bearing Christian that hasn't been through this process of pruning. There must be some of you listening to me right now. You're in the middle of the process. Don't get discouraged. It's not because you've sinned. It's because you've been bearing fruit and your Father, who loves you and knows you better than you do, knows what you are truly capable of and He will not be satisfied in your life with anything but the best.

And then let me just add one further important truth. The sharp knife God uses for pruning is His Word. Listen to what Jesus says again in John 15:2-3:

> "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean [or He prunes] so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."

I pointed out that the word "trimmed clean" and the word "clean" are related in Greek. So Jesus says, "How are you clean? How have you been trimmed clean? By the Word which I have spoken to you." This emphasizes what I said in my previous talk, the importance of staying in the Word of God. It's the Word of God that He uses to prune our lives of that which stands in the way of His highest purposes. He takes away the good, that He may in due course replace it by the best.

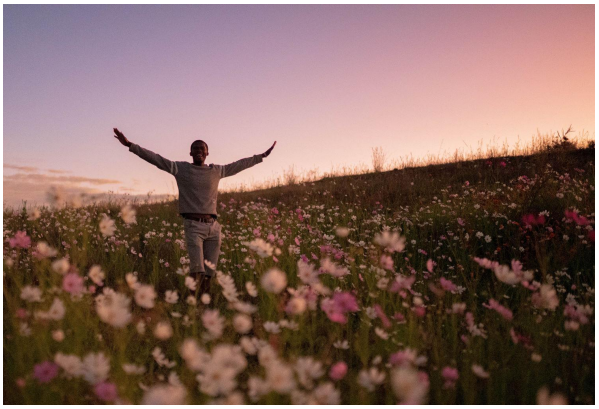
Well, our time is up for today, but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme. I'll be sharing with you four results of bearing fruit.

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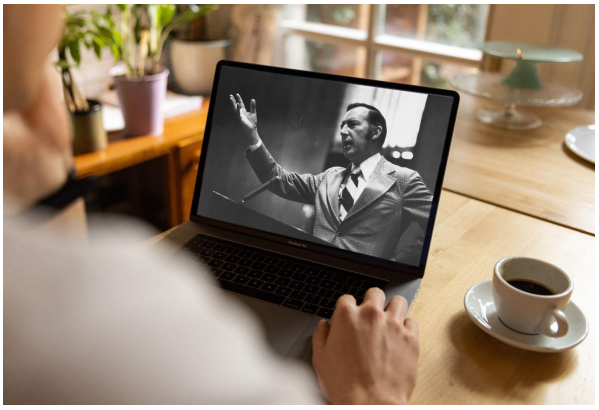
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