



WOW: Word Of the Week

Pruning

May 11, 2022

Maintaining healthy, productive plants requires pruning. Maintaining spiritual health requires accepting God's pruning.

Jan and I are notorious—at least in the minds of our sons—for severe plant pruning. We prune regularly, but sometimes something more is needed. Last year, the azaleas on the north side of our garage were beautiful, but they were twice as wide as the bed, had overgrown the sidewalk, and were 4-5 feet tall. This year they are 18-24" tall, just the right width, and beautifully covered with blooms. Why? After they bloomed last year, they received a severe pruning.

Our son's rose bush was over seven feet tall last year, with very few roses. All plant, more and more branches, no flowers. What to do? Time for a pruning. He sent me a picture last week. This spring, the plant is about 4 feet tall and covered with roses. Now he is lamenting that he didn't prune it more. Our roses are beautiful and productive each year because we carefully prune them.

When we moved into our home, the holly hedge in back went from overgrown and covering the bottom half of the windows to barely over a foot tall—visualize tall stumps! Today the hedge is healthy and beautifully shaped, thanks to regular pruning. We pruned the rhododendrons in front of the front porch of our Cape Cod in West Virginia down to 6-12"—they came back more beautiful than ever!

Jesus told his disciples that plants that are pruned bear more fruit (John 15:2). Do not miss the simplicity of Jesus' illustration. The branch that exists in close relationship to the plant, drawing nourishment and strength from the plant, bears much fruit. The connection of the branch to the plant provides all it needs to grow and be fruitful. But sometimes, the extraneous "suckers," the conflicting, crossing branches, and the unfruitful branches must be pruned. Would our Christian lives be more fruitful in bringing souls to Jesus if some of the many events, ministries, and distractions were pruned away? Would the church be more fruitful if its primary purpose were defined by the purpose of Jesus, the vine? Rose bushes produce roses? Fruit trees produce fruit? Christians produce? In too many cases, the answer is that Christians produce time spent together, mutual help and service, fun activities, or a host of other things with little impact on producing more Christians! The numbers vary, but in many churches, it takes dozens of branches (members) to produce one new disciple!

The connection of a Christian to the vine is reinforced by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps the Christian become more like Jesus, fulfilling Jesus' purpose, doing Jesus' work. In the book of Acts, when we read of Christians being "filled with the Spirit" the result was that they spoke boldly and shared the good news. The connection to the vine is maintained in our individual lives by our devotional life, unceasing prayer throughout the day and time spent listening to God (reading and studying God's Word). The church's connection is maintained by drinking deeply of God's Word, worship in the Spirit, and multiplied opportunities for using spiritual gifts.

Disciples of Jesus Christ grow continually closer to Jesus, the vine, in the Holy Spirit. Spirit-filled people know and speak God's word throughout the day, maintaining close connection through the Word and praying in the Spirit. Evidence of a strong connection to the vine is fruit-bearing. If the fruit is lacking or minimal, perhaps we need to pray for pruning in our lives and in our churches!

Our azaleas, roses, and holly hedge remind Jan and me of the need for pruning! Often, severe pruning leads to the greatest productivity!