

Time for Some Pruning?

One of my least favorite tasks is pruning our rose bushes in the spring. As the temperatures rise, the leaves on the bushes spring forth in a healthy hue... and I cut them back. It doesn't seem to make much sense, does it? And yet, as one who has grown literally more than 100 rose bushes in my lifetime, I know that if I don't cut them back now, come summertime the branches are going to be weak and spindly and the flowers are going to be small and dull. I don't claim to know everything about roses, and some who are more skilled in the art of growing them may disagree with my methods, but I do know that year after year this procedure has produced countless numbers of gloriously colorful and robust roses that have brought considerable enjoyment to those who have seen them.

Jesus taught in John 15:2 that God, the Master Gardener, prunes the branches who, through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are attached to our Lord who is the true vine (John 15:1). Hebrews 12:3-11 tells us that God disciplines His spiritual children as an earthly father disciplines his physical children. The purpose is to keep us on track. The way to heaven is difficult (Matthew 7:13-14) and demands our careful attention. God's pruning via His providential care for Christians may seem hard to bear and may even seem unwise from our extremely limited perspective, but He knows what will produce fine and fit spiritual fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). He prunes so that we may produce. We produce so that His Word may prosper in the lives that we influence.

Before we complain about the difficulties we face from time to time, perhaps we should stop and think of the possibility that maybe we're just needing a little pruning. The Lord will not leave us during these times (Hebrews 13:5) and heaven will be glorious indeed for those who endure.

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