

Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

1789 Iglehart Ave

St. Paul, MN 55104-5215

Ph. (651) 283-0568

FRUITFULNESS: THE PRUNING PROCESS

How does God prune us? There are many ways. Correction and training can come through His Word (II Tim. 3:16,17; Pr. 6:20-23), people (Pr. 9:8,9; Mt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1,2; Heb. 3:12,13; 10:24,25), circumstances (Rom. 5:1-5; Jas. 1:2-4), or even by the direct intervention of His Spirit through an internal voice, dream, or vision (Acts 10:9-20). **Any way by means of which He can confront us with truth, or use stress, to cause us to change is an effective tool for pruning.** Whether the goal is to stop a negative behavior pattern, or to encourage us to attempt new things, the Vinedresser's action is meant to be for our good, and will result in growth.

There is a difference between "correction" and "training". *The word "correction" implies a one-by-one, event-by-event procedure, which focuses on acts of behavior or attitudes which need to be redirected.* Every deviation from the standard is a call for correction. The correction is individually applied for each deviation. *It is a call to return to the right path.* The focus of the word is on outward behavior, not inward growth. Growth may often be the result, however, especially if the correction causes a person to return to abiding in Jesus. In reality, God's dealings with us are not nearly so limited to the externals. In Hebrews 12, our relationship is likened to that of a parent to their child. The word "discipline" is used to convey a larger picture. The proper context for understanding correction is within the images conveyed by this loving relationship. If we misperceive God's intent, however, we may respond to the correction with unhealthy introspection ("What is wrong with me?") or, stubborn irresponsibility ("That is just the way I am!"). We may interpret correction in light of a performance-based, conditional relationship with God. This will lead us into the bondages of legalism, frustration, or even angry rebellion.

God knows we have no ability within ourselves to consistently express righteousness. Our relationship with Him is based on grace. *We were saved by His provision, we also become Christlike in our character by the effect of His inner life being expressed through us.* Jesus said that apart from Him we could do nothing (Jn. 15:5). He sees that quite plainly. He never forgets it or loses sight of it, though we often do. **His correction is not meant to judge or condemn us. It is meant to call us to discover a better way.** *Because of His moment-by-moment inner provision, through the Holy Spirit, there is another way to live that expresses the glory of God, instead of falling short of it* (Rom. 3:23). Correction is a call or invitation to us to return to the Vine for life and refreshment. It is an encouragement to us to know that there is another way to live that produces a different, righteous result. **Discipline is a reminder that we are in a special relationship with Him** (Heb. 12:5-11). He is not at all indifferent toward us. It challenges us to learn how to walk with Him in undiscovered or forgotten paths that will produce Christlikeness in our character.

While correction deals with behaviors, training focuses upon the end product of growth, i.e., the fulfillment of potential in maturation. *Training is using controlled stress to produce a certain desired end.* With the illustration of the Vine, pruning is the correction of deviant or imperfect growth, whereas training would be more akin to tying up the plant to encourage it to climb a stake or trellis so that it might be more productive. An extreme example of horticultural training would be a bonsai tree. The gardener takes great care, using an amazing array of techniques and equipment, to prune and train the little tree over years to grow into exactly the desired proportions and shape to produce the intended effect. In animal husbandry, one "cultivates" and "nurtures" by seeing that the environment provided for the animal is conducive to growth. One "prunes" by correcting any defects in body or behavior which may be detrimental (e.g., removing horns on calves, etc.). **Finally, one must use a strategy to train certain animals to accomplish particular desired goals that will not be fulfilled effectively through the process of natural development alone.** For example, you have to train a racehorse by breaking him into riding, and using a program of controlled stress to strengthen and develop his endurance and speed. **Care must be taken to use stress which will consistently and**

increasingly challenge his growing abilities. Without pushing him to uncomfortably extend himself, there will be no growth. At the same time, wisdom must keep these stressful experiences within the bounds of his abilities. If driven too hard, he may hurt himself irreparably or, without opportunity to rest and be restored, he may simply wear out with fatigue. In the end, if he has had a wise trainer, he will reach his full potential of health, strength, and usefulness as well.

God, the Master Farmer, deals with us as a carefully trained bonsai tree or a fine race horse. He will stretch us and train us with the controlled stresses which He permits or introduces into our experience. **Though momentarily uncomfortable, it is through this very process that we achieve our full potential of strength, beauty, health, and endurance** (Rom. 5:3-5; II Cor. 4:7-18). There is no doubt that the pruning and training processes are often painful. The plant is wounded. It bleeds. Many times, shock seems to set in and it appears to be temporarily set back. When it rebounds, however, its life seems to come back with much more strength. It prospers, quickly becoming lush and productive.

Father, help us to remember that You love us, and will allow only what You can work together for good in our lives. You are the Potter, we are the clay (Isa. 64:8). We yield to You.

FOR MEDITATION: Hebrews 12:10b,11.

He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Need For Creative Thinking

“Since becoming a Christian I’ve come to realize that wherever serious Christians gather, we can anticipate being challenged in the areas of Bible study, prayer and holy living. Yet, even though none of us has mastered The Big Three, I suggest that serious Christians need to add a fourth virtue: thinking.

“Thousands of average churches exist [where] week after week [the people] are challenged to grow in The Big Three. Yet their churches remain static, lacking the missing dynamic that only front-line ministries can produce. Sensing that lack of dynamic, sincere leaders urge the flock to prayer even harder, to spend more time in Bible study and to live purer lives. But the church continues to remain static and ingrown.

“What is needed is to retain the emphasis on The Big Three, and to add the spark of thinking. Everyone, not just the elders, needs to have permission to think. Why? Because people in churches generally are conditioned to assume that ‘somebody up there is doing all the necessary thinking’. Yet, when everyone is encouraged to think, the other three areas come alive. Instead of mechanical prayer and Bible study, we then have dynamic prayer and study of the Word.

“We live in days of unusual opportunity. There is not a sector of our culture that cannot be effectively penetrated with the gospel. We have the people resources to do it! But we don’t have the creative mind-sets. The average Christian must accept the challenge for ministry. Unfortunately, churches do not have a good track record in creating and unleashing dreamers. Too often new approaches to ministry are discouraged. Instead, the average church and its members need to create an atmosphere where [all the] people can dream dreams of ministry with the primary objective to glorify God and to enable every person to be at maximum in their own spiritual growth and ministry to others.

“Over the years dreamers in our church have been used by God to conceive, establish and run a host of ministries. The average church can produce multiple ministries, if the average people in them will pray, study Scripture, live holy lives and think and dream dreams.”

Excerpts from Unleashing Your Potential by Frank Tillapaugh (Regal Books:CA, 1988) Pp. 40-44.