

## Pruned

I've never worked a grape vine. Therefore, it is easy for me to miss the point behind Jesus's parable in **John 15:1-11**.

Jesus is the vine; we are the branches. In the past, I misunderstood this picture. I thought the very long strand along the trellis was the vine and the little shoots were the branches. The vine is actually the trunk like part that grows up from the ground. The branches are the long strands branching from the "trunk" and draped along the trellis by the vinedresser.

The first principle Jesus teaches is a branch will only bear fruit if it abides in the vine. If a branch gets separated from the vine, it simply cannot bear fruit. The nutrients soak through the roots, go up through the vine, and travel along the branches in order to grow fruit. If we hope to bear fruit for Him (see **Galatians 5:22-23**), we must abide in Him. **John 15:7** explains abiding in Jesus doesn't mean having a wonderful feeling about Jesus in our hearts. It means allowing His Word to abide in us and us to abide in His Word. We cannot bear fruit apart from God's Word.

If a branch doesn't produce fruit, the vinedresser won't want that branch using up nutrients and sunlight. He'll cut it completely off and cast it into the fire. I doubt any of us are surprised by that. However, more surprising is what he does with the fruit-bearing branch. We might expect Jesus to say the fruit-bearing branch gets watered, pampered, protected. Nope. It gets pruned.

Do you know what pruning is? Yep. It means getting bit cut off. Why? Pruning promotes greater growth. If the vinedresser simply watered, pampered, and protected the fruit-bearing branch, the one batch of fruit is all it will give. Within a few seasons it will completely cease to bear fruit. What happens to branches that don't bear fruit? They get cast into the fire. The vinedresser prunes bits off the fruit-bearing branch because new growth will sprout from the pruned places, and new fruit will be born there. Pruning protects the fruit-bearing branches from death and the fire.

Pruning doesn't sound pleasant to me. However, we need to understand what this parable explains. In my finite wisdom (or perhaps I should say infinite ignorance), I think if I've been bearing fruit for God, my life should get easy. I should be pampered by God and protected from hardship. When difficulty comes, I think some scandal is taking place and start complaining to God. However, Jesus explains the difficulties and discipline of the Lord are absolutely necessary. In fact, the pruning is what keeps me from getting cast into the fire. Just as **Hebrews 12:3-11** explains, it is actually God's love that prompts the disciplinary pruning. As counterintuitive as it seems, pruning is the best way for a fruit-bearing branch to be pampered and protected.

Therefore, here are our choices. We can get pampered for now, and then eventually get cut off completely and cast into the fire. Or we can get pruned, and bear more fruit for God's glory. With that in mind, which one do you want?

We are saved by pruning. Don't fear it. Rejoice in it. Glorify God for it.