



Chapter 4

Lift Up and Then Prune

Reflections to Journal and Share

- Does the soil of your life right now have too many cultural and good-life nutrients in it? Are you too busy?
- Are you generating too many leaves (activities), but little Kingdom fruit? The “good life” and the frenetic life can so easily become a detriment to a spiritually fruitful life. Ask God to take away those cultural stimulants and activities that are detrimental to your spiritual formation and growth.
- When did those flavor enhancing stressed situations and circumstances arrive in your life? How did they reshape you?
- What would you consider to be the “leafy” activities in your life right now that are keeping the “Son’s rays” from ripening your fruit? Are you asking the Holy Spirit where you need to be pruned right now, and then inviting Him in to do it?
- What are the barriers we often erect in our lives to keep us from asking those kinds of pruning questions and issuing those kinds of pruning invitations? As an encouragement to ask for pruning, remember what happens to a vineyard that never gets pruned.
- Do you see the need for continuous pruning in your life, or do you have a flawed notion that pruning is something that needs to be done every ten years or so, and then only for a brief 30-day period?
- What would you say is the next thing that God needs to start pruning in your life?
- Have all of your cultural and religious paradigms been stripped away so you can fully see and understand the Kingdom of God?

A Point to Ponder

Nothing is ever discarded in the Middle East. That is also true for Judean vineyards. Resources are far too scarce for anything to be thrown away. There is always a secondary use for everything. Those branches that do get pruned are set aside for a secondary use. The vinedresser deliberately places each pruned branch on top of the rock wall that surrounds the vineyard. There the branches will dry out for several weeks. When sufficiently dry, they are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned as kindling (15:6 NIV) in the village’s bread ovens. Even though these pruned branches will not be producing grapes, they still serve a useful purpose in the making of bread. Now consider the aforementioned 15:6 from that perspective remembering that bread and wine are the two elements Jesus chose for that first Communion at the Last Supper. Could it likewise be that what we have traditionally thought this verse is saying is contextually quite different? Something to further ponder!

A wise person is usually one who has learned from his or her mistakes and is willing to share those insights with others. We tend to be most fruitful in the lives of others when we minister to them out of our scars, not out of our successes.