

Pruning

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ~ John 15:2 (NIV)

I love my plants, and I feel a special connection to them, especially the ones I have grown from seed or nurtured for many years. I check on them every morning and am thrilled when they grow. Yes, I even speak with them and encourage the ones who seem to be struggling.

My husband is dangerous when he gets the sheers in hand, and I cringe when he heads out to the garden. “Be gentle! Please leave at least some of the blooms!” I wince knowing that the cassia, once huge and filled with beautiful yellow flowers will be a few stubs sticking up out of the ground. As a matter of fact, the professional picture that I use for my author portrait shot was taken in front of this very cassia.

“What do you mean you cut half the cassia out of the ground?”

I knew I should have been out there with him to supervise the pruning. I trusted him, and now there’s not much of it left, just a few sticks sticking up out of the ground.

“It was weak, rotting, and hurting the health of the plant. It had to go.” He showed me the rotten branches. I sighed. Every year we go through this, and every year, the cassia grows back huge and stronger than ever, sporting even more blooms.

I am not good at pruning anything or chopping off full branches. I always see a little bit of green emerging within it that encourages me to let it be. Yet, the plants that I’ve “pruned” tend to be spindly, and the blooms are not as thick and long lasting. Even worse, some that I didn’t have the heart to prune died because of it. The same is true with pruning my life, and sometimes God has had to do the job for me.

As a child, my mother and I saved everything, all my papers, pictures, knick-knacks, posters, dolls (which I maintained in perfect condition; I even kept the plastic around Barbie's head to protect her hair), dresses, and on and on. I never lost a doll shoe; they were in special boxes. We had so much, and since we were all moving about at that time, it waited for us in a storage unit. That unit was struck by lightning. Everything burned, all my Barbies, Beatle cards, saved precious memory trinkets, confirmation dress, etc. My mom lost a Civil War chest with my ancestor’s uniform along with a CCC uniform worn by my uncle. The only things left were a Bible and a book written by an author who shared a name with my grandmother.

Sometimes, we have so much accumulated stuff that it becomes an albatross, weighing us down, preventing us from moving forward, cleaning, or hindering our progress. We must pay extra to keep it in storage, serving no purpose except to gather dust.

In the same manner, long held hurts weigh heavy on our hearts, hindering our spiritual, emotional, or cognitive growth. Whether it’s concrete or emotional baggage, some of it needs a good pruning. Other branches that have been producing fruit may be stale or slowed, and these need to be clipped.

Now What? Week #6

It doesn't mean the hurts didn't happen or that we didn't love the relative; it just means that it's time for that item to move on to another home; it has worn out its use, and it must go.

It scares me to ask God to prune. He is quite thorough when he does this and has always answered that prayer with efficient and effective results that are not always easy to stomach. I have survived these times, learned from them, and grown, but it doesn't mean I want to live through them again. My faith that God knows me and loves me just as I am, helps me to trust Him when I ask for His guidance. That's not easy; I must give up control and accept change, and that is exactly what spiritual pruning does.

During these times of isolation, as Earth cleanses herself, and we are physically apart from one another, it is time to visit the parts of our homes and our souls. With all the distractions removed, we can focus on what is necessary, cut the branches holding us back, and clip the ones that need to thicken and bloom. Perhaps when all of this is over, after the pruning, we will find that we have grown stronger and blossomed into a new being.

Reflection: Go to the garden and prune one plant. Think about how you decided which branches to prune. Try to see yourself from God's point of view. What do you think He'd say about you and your life?

Response: What areas of your house or spiritual life seem cluttered, confused, or closed? Where is pruning needed? Imagine the renewal and freedom that will occur within! Identify at least five life or home branches that need pruning. Then make some decisions. Ask God for wisdom and guidance:

- Which require a gentle clipping?
- Which ones need cutting or pulling from the ground?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for my life. I'm sure there are areas I need to grow, and sometimes these areas require pruning. God, guide me to prune the areas of my life that keep me from you. Help me to remove my weeds, and most of all, help me sift through the clutter of my home, my mind, and my spirit to find the things, ideas, and habits that need to be cut, shared, or encouraged. Thank you for the blessing of life, now help me use it to advance your purpose and do your work. Amen.