

He will take away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and He prunes every branch that does bear fruit so that it bears more fruit.

Many of our prayers are juvenile and cluttered with vanity, pride, and selfishness. The Spirit of God, through Jesus Christ, prunes us. That is, He plants desires for the things of heaven in our hearts, and we begin to see things as God sees them: our thoughts and our desires. For all eternity, God has seen our present moment with all its love, fears, anxiety, and trials, according to our state in life. He has willed from all eternity that this moment is the best possible event that could happen—chosen out of all the events that could happen. It is this particular event that God uses to show His love for us, and through which we are to show our love for Him.

Our prayers and activities in this present moment are to be used to totally surrender ourselves to God in Christ. This calls for total detachment and abandonment to the divine will. Our prayers must also be ones of detachment. This means to "let go and let God." This letting go is not easy, since we want to be in charge of our destiny.

This letting go does not mean we stick our heads in the sand and act as if everything that happens to us is rosy. It doesn't mean we aren't annoyed by distractions in prayer or pretend that we are holier than we really are. True letting go means not being anxious about our prayer life and spiritual growth, and not being concerned about which "mansion" we are in. Neither are we to be overly concerned about how close we are to God. Our primary concern should be: Are we letting go, and are we letting God?

If we are beginning to get closer to God, if we are truly beginning to imitate Jesus, then we are beginning to live in the present moment. When Jesus says, "You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you," this is to say that if you love Him, and if this desire is at the bottom of your heart, and if this desire is like a consuming fire that never gives you any rest—then no matter how much you may feel that you are not in love, you are closer to Him than you realize. So, "as a man thinks, so he is." This is to say that a person such as this is in love with God. If you think only of pleasing God, you can be sure that you are pleasing God to some degree, although it may not be at the level you wish it were.

My suggestion to you is to continue to seek God with all your heart. Make no mistake: you cannot seek God unless it is He who is drawing you to Himself. It is God who is leading you to greater and greater depths of spirit and a new level of consciousness—a consciousness that makes you yearn to leave the things of this world behind and seek only the things of God. It is at this point that God leads the soul into the barren desert, which is the prayer of quiet. It is here that God teaches the soul detachment. The desert, at first, seems harsh and barren to the soul. At first, the soul sees nothing but dark nights and hot days. Here the soul finds nothing to love because it was accustomed to meditation. In that prior state of prayer, the

soul found pleasure and rested in the joy of God.

Now that God has led the soul into this desert, He can speak to the soul and show the sweetness of the divine heart. But the soul rebels because it remains attached to the pleasures of the senses and the imagination. The spirit does not want to let go of these pleasures. But unless the soul lets go of the things of sense, it cannot experience the desert into which God has led it. It must let go of the things of the senses, and God will lead the soul to a new level of awareness.

This relates to John's imagery of "remaining in Him" ("in me, with me"), suggesting a mutual indwelling or "in-ness." The letting go motif is also present in the test of the truest love of all: the letting go of life for the sake of someone else. But letting go is also a spiritual act—we let go of our fears, our past, and our present concerns.

As our faith in Jesus grows, it becomes easier for us to let go. Because our eyes are on our Savior, our faith constantly tells us that it is God's love for us that keeps us in existence—a love continuously telling us that all things come from the hand of God, either by His will or by His permission.

So, we can say again: all thoughts that do not bear fruit He cuts away, replacing those fruitless thoughts with thoughts that do bear fruit—fruit that brings us closer to God. This barrenness within us represents what is less than God Himself. This love *is* God, and this fruitfulness originating from God *is* God Himself working within us. This fruit that we will bear will last forever because this fruit will lead to life everlasting.

So when we think of a vine that bears fruit, we are thinking of the true vine. We are only "true vines" if we are attached to Christ. Now, God can live in us, but unless we cooperate with God's graces, we will not bear fruit. And if we do not bear fruit, God will cast us aside. (By this, I mean God will give us only as much as we are willing to receive from Him).

If we are to remain in Christ, we must strive for absolute abandonment and surrender, and our faith must go from strength to strength as we move from love to love. As our love deepens, we are opened to new levels of awareness. We see life and all God's creation in a new light.

Jesus reminds us that "without me you can do nothing." The very inspirations that are good and holy come from God alone and not from ourselves. It is the Spirit working in Christ that sets our hearts on fire. As we yield and cooperate with these inspirations, we become like dough being kneaded in the hand of a baker. We become more pliable, and more and more, God takes over our life—but only insofar as we let Him, since our free will is never violated. The Spirit of God prays more and more in our stead, and we pray less. Then we are true

contemplatives, for only the Spirit of God knows what is pleasing to God. And it is only the Spirit of God that can raise our souls to the very height of God. For the more we surrender to the promptings of God, the more we become like God. And it is at these times God calls us His children. In the supreme emptiness of detachment, man, woman, and God are united.