



January 4, 2009 – Will Mackey

When God Takes Away... (John 15:1-2, 4-5)

Intro: Romans 8:31, 35, 37-39

Why does God allow Christians to experience hardship?

- God allows hardship so we will learn to trust in Him and not in ourselves. (2 Cor. 1:8-9)
- God allows hardship in order to bring humility to our lives and train us in how to live life depending upon God's power. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)
- God allows hardship in order to mature our character and develop our spiritual perseverance. (James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-4)
- God allows hardship in order to test our faith and entrust us with opportunities based upon what He finds. (James 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:1-4)
- God allows hardship so we learn to identify with the pain of others and learn how to bring comfort to them. (2 Cor. 1:3-5)
- God allows hardship in order to advance His work among the unsaved by showing His Life and His Gospel through us as we suffer. (Phil. 1:12-13; Col. 1:24)
- God allows hardship to punish and discipline His people for sinning. (Hebrews 12:4-11; Gal. 6:7)
- God allows hardship to act as a pruning agent to remove those things which hinder us from bearing spiritual fruit. (John 15:1-2, 4-5)

The Message:

***"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit...Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
(John 15:1-2, 4-5 NKJV)***

1. Christ is the Vine, Christians are the branches, and the Father is the Gardener.
2. The purpose of the branch is to live in the vine and bear a lot of fruit. Our job is to live in Christ and bear Christ-like fruit.
3. The purpose of the gardener is to make sure the vine is producing fruit through its branches. The gardener's job is twofold:
 - Take away branches from the vine that don't bear fruit
 - Prune branches on the vine that are bearing fruit so they will bear even more fruit.
4. Pruning is a work of removal. The gardener removes sprigs and parasites from the branch that can drain life and energy from the fruit bearing process. In the spring the gardener cuts back the branch drastically, often leaving only what appears to be a barren stump. In the fall the same branch will be full of delicious grapes. At first glance, pruning seems cruel to the branch. In reality, it is the healthiest thing for it.
5. For the Christian, the Father's pruning process is also a work of removal. In this process, the Father often removes those things that drain life, energy, and focus away from bearing Christ-like fruit. He takes away our dependency upon...our pre-occupation for unfruitful things.

It is a time of simplification. It is a time when our time, talents, and resources are re-tooled and refocused so that we can bear more fruit. It can be an uncomfortable time...even a time when we question whether or not God really loves and cares for us. In reality, it is the healthiest thing for us. .

How Should We Respond to God's Pruning Process?

1. For those in it...we should cooperate with the Father.
2. For those in it...we should rejoice because if we are being pruned it means we are already bearing some fruit and the Father is helping us become even more fruitful.
3. For those not currently in the pruning process...we should pray for and encourage those who are in the process...remembering what it was like when we went through it and realizing it will soon be our turn again.