

## WHEN NO IS GOOD

As I was trying to come up with a connection between John's passage about pruning and Mother's Day,....I first thought of the Family tree, with the potential for pruning,.... but Leslie said I better not go there.

Today's passage are about cultivation, learning, growing, improving, refining, being fully productive, researching, obedience..... and.... dare I say it.... DISCIPLINE!

Discipline is usually not regarded as a warm, feel good activity. Discipline is full of negative connotations, and we especially despise discipline when it comes to us from someone else. Even self-discipline has a martyr flavour to it.

Nevertheless, ..... like it or not..... Healthy, productive Discipline is when NO is Good.

.....And, I wonder if we have lost a sensible appreciation and devotion to "constructive Discipline."  
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I don't know,..... sometimes I feel like one of those two old men, in the TV commercial, who are sitting on the bench in front of the bank, criticizing the way things are today. ???

Regardless, I think we have become more lazy. It sure seems like many people in our culture have lots an appreciation for hard work. We expect everything to "easily" come to us.... as if we are entitled. Part of the shock of this current recession is that it was a big inconvenience – as if a down turn was against the law. ??? I do think we are a little spoiled, and many of us live in a world of make believe video games, where reality is a TV show. ....?? Maybe I'm being a little harsh????

Yet,..... when we loose an appreciation for delayed gratification, for hard work, redundant practice and focussed, constructive Discipline, then.... we will miss out on real living, we will HAVE more regrets, and worse– we could find ourselves in bondage.

I'm not alone in this assessment.

One day God was looking down at earth and saw all of the glutenous, selfish behaviour that was going on. So God told one of the angels.

"Go down to earth. Find out what is going on."

The angel returned and reported to God. "Yes, it is bad on Earth; 95% are lazy and misbehaving and only 5% are not."

God thought for a moment, and then decided to get a second opinion. So a second angel was sent. That angel returned and went directly to God.

"Yes, it's true. The World is in decline; 95% are just going along, but 5% are being good."

God was not pleased, and thought to God's self,

"I will send an e-mail to the 5% who are good. I want to encourage them, and help them keep going. The future of the world depends on them."

Do you know what the e-mail said?

**No?? – You don't know?**

You mean, you didn't get that e-mail?????

That was a joke. I don't think God does email; however, God has sent us lots of messages, and John 15 is one of those messages.

In that passage, Jesus presents the metaphor of pruning.

Jesus does a nice job of explaining the process and virtues of pruning. Good pruning produces a better yield on fruit trees, and mind you it must be done carefully and correctly, and not recklessly or brutally.

However, when I helped a friend prune his orchard, I was shocked by how many branches he was removing. He was being very selective, but still,..... he cut away a lot of branches..... YET, the trees bore many, many good apples from his pruning.

We all appreciate the benefits of good pruning, .... but I don't think the tree appreciates it. And, that is the challenge of discipline – during the process, it is rarely appreciated.

This metaphor is to inform us of the importance of being “connected” to “the vine” – Christ .... and that God **does do** “pruning.”  
God cultivates / nurtures for “good” growth. God does discipline!

Yet, I wonder if we fully appreciate what that means – the discipline?

How are we living our lives?

How do we receive God's discipline? How are we doing with self-discipline..... or do we think growth / wholeness.... just happens ???

And, how well are we cultivating our children and instilling our children with an appreciation for discipline?

Let us keep in mind, that children tend to learn best by observing adults' behaviours and practices.

Do we tell our children that church is optional, that it doesn't make a difference if they attend or not?

I am not attempting to give instructions on how to parent.

I'm not qualified to do that, nor am I brave enough to do that.

However, there are many helpful books about parenting, and I will note some of the obvious “good” advice that “experts” give to parents.

Such as:

–Limit the TV time, which includes video games.

–Enough sleep and consuming healthy food are both very important, as is vigorous exercise.

And, modelling good behaviour works best.....

Are we demonstrating a “disciplined” lifestyle,.... and how are we modelling our spiritual disciplines?

Do our children see our passion for being a follower of Christ and being in a healthy relationship with God?

Moreover, the overriding principle to discipline is the purpose / the reason. No sane person will workout daily for no reason whatsoever. We do discipline for a reason.

Jesus said it was to bear good fruit, and that process values growth, refinement, nurture, education, the pursuit of truth and delayed gratification. Life is not about feeding our lusts and just feeling Good for the moment!

We must encourage our children to learn that lesson, and to acquire intrinsic motivation.

And, discipline is cultivating the good. Discipline is NOT punishment.

In regards to children, punishment reveals a lack of creativity, and it is inflicted for the benefit of the adult and NOT the child.

Now, someone maybe thinking, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

The "rod" is a shepherd's tool, and I like to think of that line in the context of Psalm 23 – the "rod" comforts.

A shepherd's rod is best used to prod, encourage the sheep to go a certain way. The shepherd didn't beat the sheep with it.

There is comfort in being shown a better direction to take / a better way.

Okay, .... I may be coming close to giving parenting advice, ... but just in a general sort of way.

Even so, I want to add three more "disciplines."

All are for our children and our selves, so I'll direct them to "us."

Learn an art, such as playing the piano, but any art will do.

Art is the opposite of war; it is being creative / constructive, AND...art is a healthy way of expressing our emotions.

Too many people only know how to scream or do destruction to express their feelings.

Do the discipline to learn to be skilled at an art.

Second, practice the discipline of learning new words. The better our vocabulary the better we can organize our thoughts and express our thoughts. To be sure, this applies to children and adults.

And third, pursue wisdom and truth by asking good questions!

Proverbs 18:2 states, "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion."

These days, it seems, people are confusing opinion with reasoned, well researched information.

Take for example, talk radio, and this even includes CBC. This past Thursday a journalist was giving his opinion about World Trade.

Well, he is not an expert on world trade, so why is he sharing his opinion on the radio? I turned the radio off, I don't need to hear opinion. As the Proverb 18:2 points out, opinions are not worth much, and everyone has one.

In the Acts passage, the Ethiopian was wise enough to admit that he could not understand the scripture he was reading; he asked for help from someone more qualified.

The path to wholeness / to bearing fruit requires that we do the research and that we ask good questions, which includes confessing what we do not know for certain.

Time is precious, so I'll get to the point.

Discipline is the process required to grow, to be a better person to be refined / to be all we can be.

But, who cares? Does it really matter? Why is it important, Especially, when our culture affirms laziness?

The hazards and consequences of an undisciplined life are many and ugly: Laziness and self indulgence lends a person to be abused, to be deceived, to be a victim, to be in addiction, to have more regrets and to be in bondage.

As the Ethiopian did in the Acts passage, do the research, ask for help.

The ShamWOW, from the TV commercial, does NOT absorb 20% of its weight. It's a lie, and a sponge is cheaper.

If something is too good to be true, then..... . . . . think about it.

And, Jesus did not go about his life, teaching and modelling a better way just to die on the cross.

Jesus life and message has value, as does the passage in John 15.

There is work, pruning – DISCIPLINE – involved in growing spiritually / in being pleasing to God, and to bearing Good Fruit.

And, add to that in being free.

I'll end with a story.

Many of you are familiar with my Duck and Dog story – how my dog, Joe, did not learn self restraint and killed my pet Duck.

Well I have another Dog story, and this one is about Louie.

Louie was a big German Shepherd; he was over 100 pounds.

When I got him as a puppy, while at seminary, the breeder told me that he was bred for a gentle disposition, but also warned me that he was going to be big. People are going to fear him, and even if kids throw stones at him, he must be taught restraint or..... he'll be put down if he fights back and bites someone.

So, I did the discipline and spent many, many hours to train him to be disciplined.

My dog Louie, was Not like Joe. Louie would even obey voice commands. He was very obedient..... which made him free.

That may surprise you, but it shouldn't.

I could take Louie down to the park by the Ohio River, and let him run free without a leash. If people or other dogs came near, I'd call him, and he'd run to my side.

Most of the time, he could run and explore as much as his heart wanted to, to a point. However, all the other dogs in the park had to be on a tight leash, all of the time.

Discipline made him free—in a healthy way – he was free and connected!

We are NOT as Dogs, and life is not that simple.

Yet, we Do respond to a voice. We do follow a call – the call from God that mimics the footsteps of Christ.

Our presence, here today, is a declaration that we value discipline.  
We said NO to sleeping in or to another activity.

We are a minority. We have chosen to take the narrow road, the road of discipline.

We do not measure our success by how good we feel right now or in the size of our church attendance.

We measure our success by the steps we are taking and the direction we are going. Our journey with God is the discipline of following Christ.

Moreover, our theology is not of a victim being controlled by a Spiritual leash. WE are not helpless. WE have choice, and we have chosen / we are choosing..... to follow the way of Christ.

We strive to bear good fruit.....For the sake of our children..... For the sake of God, ... and for the sake of each other,..... and for the sake of ourselves..... we delay gratification. We are in process. We are on a journey with God, and discipline is Good.