**POWER OF PRAISE**

by: Liz Wahl Andre’

“The Pruning”

Jesus told His disciples, ***“Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me”*** (John 15:2,4).

Abiding in Jesus Christ means trusting Him fully in all things and total dependence upon Him. No matter how much suffering, pain and turmoil we endure, it means clinging steadfastly to Him and His Word. Although our world may seem to be crumbling around us, abiding in His presence is akin to being in the eye of the hurricane—a place of calm though chaos and destruction is whirling all around.

This kind of trust just does not happen. It is a result of pruning in our lives that allows our trust in God to blossom. God will deal with and cut away everything in our lives that hinders our spiritual growth. Unless a bush is pruned, it grows wildly in every direction, and does not produce the amount of fruit it would if cut back. Pruning a plant seems as though it is destroying it, but it serves to make it stronger and more verdant. The Lord desires to display His people before an unbelieving world that needs Him for their salvation and for His glory. The strength of godly character and the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, is the purpose of the pruning. (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we are in a season of being pruned by the Lord, that is good news. It means that God has seen our growth in learning to abide in Him and He is taking away that which hinders our further growth and fruitfulness. Perhaps it is doubt, fear or stubborn self-will. He begins to prune us back to clear out the last vestige of the most wicked sin in humanity: unbelief. Unbelief is the root sin from which all other sins usher forth.

The Husbandman cuts away determinedly to that end—it is for the plant’s ultimate good health. It may seem in the season of pruning that God is punishing us for some sin. There are things that we hold onto that God desires to remove: wrong relationships, idols of excessive entertainment and materialism, stubbornness, rebellion, pride or an unteachable spirit. It can be excruciating when God cuts away that which we cling to for our own comfort and security. It is in this that our hearts are tested until we surrender, saying as our Lord Jesus did in the Garden of Gesthemene, ***“…nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.”*** (Luke 22:42).

Though pruning is not pleasant, it is necessary to receive life by abiding in the vine. Better to endure the temporarily painful, but beneficial process of pruning, than to wither and die. Jesus gave us a warning about not abiding in Him: ***“If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned”*** (John 15:6). We must allow the Holy Spirit to comfort us in all of our trials. It is meant for the trying of our faith, to purify it as fine gold. If we lose sight of the purposes of God’s dealings in our lives, we will become angry and bitter at God. This will cause us to wither and dry up. We can cut ourselves off from the very Source of life.

Jesus adds a promise to His warning***. “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in His love”*** (John 15:10). What were the commands the Father gave Jesus? Jesus told His disciples that He only spoke what His Father told Him to say, and did that which the Father told Him to do, even unto death. Jesus’ model of humility and obedience was for all believers to pattern themselves after.

There is only one kind of servant who is prepared to minister to others—the trusting, fully dependent servant. If we have a tried and tested experience, the Holy Spirit will use the fruit of our trial to convict, convince and draw others to the cross for salvation.

If you’re going through the test of your life and there is no way you can work your way through it, your prayer may be, “Lord, I’ve come to the end of myself. Please help me!” God is purging you and showing you that there is only one way to be able to serve Him in these last days—that is by fully abiding in Him. You are right in the center of God’s will to make you produce much fruit and learn patience that will be married to your faith. Trust Him and He will see you through it all. You will be prepared for the last days ahead and triumphantly cross the finish line.

***“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.”*** (John 15:5)

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