

# Worship Team Expedition Weekly Devotional



## Week 6: John 15:1-8

“What? Wait! Do you really want to cut that branch off?”

Our friend Dorothy Moehl was describing her experience in a vineyard with a German viticulturist (the name for a vineyard farmer, in case you didn't know— I had to look that one up!). Dorothy and her husband Ed are missionary friends who have served in Germany for many years. God has worked mightily through their ministry to found a church planting network that has grown to over 50 churches. So they know something about developing ministries, investing in leaders, and nurturing people towards Christ. My wife Katie and I always listen when they talk.

Dorothy and this viticulturist friend from church were in the vineyard one winter day and Dorothy said the vines looked pretty bleak. Apparently that was the wrong thing to say.

“Oh, no!” said her friend. “The vines are quite healthy. Don't let their appearance during winter fool you.” The viticulturist offered to show Dorothy how she tended to the vines through the winter months and so lessons in vine-tending began. The big shock came when it was time to prune.

The vines' head stock had a few branches coming off of it. There was a big main branch— the major fruit bearing branch from the previous harvest— and a few smaller offshoots, just little stems really. Picture a solid branch next to some little twigs and you'll have the idea. Dorothy's friend handed her the shears and told her to...gulp...cut off the main branch. The main fruit bearing branch!

Dorothy thought this didn't seem right at all. But her friend insisted and so— crrrunch— the branch was lopped off. How could this be right?

Apparently if you keep the main branch, the grapes in the coming harvest will grow only *half as big* as last year's harvest. The branch has peaked and it's time to make room for new growth. But these little twigs- are those really the hope for the future?

One twig was about 18 inches, the other about 6 inches long. Dorothy's friend grabbed the longer twig and said “This is the tricky part. You have to bend it, distress it just the right amount to get the sap flowing without breaking it, then tie

it down. That bent, tied down twig will eventually be this year's main fruit bearing branch. The smaller twig will be next year's main branch. It's very important to care for these fledgling stems as they are vulnerable and small now. They are the future of the vine."

Wow. Dorothy said it was quite a sight to see those little vulnerable stems bent over and tied down. To the untrained eye you'd think they were damaged, small, maybe even dead. But God had big things planned for those little twigs.

Can you see where I'm going with this?

Look at Jesus' words in John 15: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener (verse 1); you are the branches (verse 5)...every branch that does bear fruit he *prunes* so that it will be even more fruitful (verse 2)."

God wants the best for our future. And sometimes that means painful cuts now so that there will be better fruit later.

Maybe you've had a season of fruitfulness but now it feels like winter. The "branch that bore fruit" isn't producing the same anymore. Maybe it has even been cut off. You wonder what in the world happened. And the new branches, well, those are just little twigs, bent over, tied down, small and vulnerable. You can't really bank on those, right? There may be some promise there, but will it ever be like the good ole' days when things were thriving? You're putting on a brave face, but behind the scenes you're fighting feelings of fear, frustration, discouragement, confusion, maybe even anger and despair. What's going on?

God is prepping you for a new season of growth and fruitfulness.

It may not look like it now, while you feel small and bound up and damaged. While it's cold and inhospitable out. While it just hurts. But, listen to the words of our Lord Jesus to your soul today:

"If you remain in me and I in you, *you will bear much fruit* (verse 5); this is to my Father's glory, that *you bear much fruit*, showing yourselves to be my disciples (verse 8)."

If you stay connected to Christ, walk with Him, remain in Him, it's going to get better. A lot better. Maybe not this second, maybe not even this week or next month. But it will happen eventually. He promised it.

He could be allowing you to feel overwhelmed so that you recognize your need to cut out some time to just be with Him. Something or someone you really relied on may be gone now so that you learn that you can stand on your own two feet, that you are stronger than you thought. A job went bye-bye and God is going to provide in amazing ways and move you into something that's way better. The

doctor just delivered a scary medical diagnosis and you'll sense God's presence like never before as you focus on what is certain in the middle of uncertain circumstances. A financial situation tanked and the lessons learned will help you manage your finances in a much more solid way in the future.

Think about it- as you look back over your life with Christ, you've seen God come through before, right? Sure the circumstances are different (and maybe *WAY* bigger) this time, but the same God who carried you through and used that tough season to unlock new and greater fruitfulness– that same God will do it again. So long as you remain in Him, He will nurture and cultivate and protect that distressed, fledgling twig, growing it into something strong and productive and fruitful.

Hang in there. He's working behind the scenes. Don't let the enemy fool you with the wintry, dead way things appear right now. God is pruning you for better things. He's removing the good to make room for the *great*. The best is truly yet to come.

### **Questions for Thought**

Take a few moments to read and reflect on Jesus' words in John 15:1-8.

Is there something good in my life that God has taken away to make room for something better? How have I responded to that?

Is there something in my life (even something good, perhaps) that needs to go because it is holding me back from what's best?

The distressed, bent over, tied down twig– have I felt that way (or do I feel that way now)? What is God saying to me about that experience?

What new opportunities, interests, or paths in my life is God showing me that could hold strong promise for the future (even if those things seem small now)?