

Small Group Discussion

Welcome

How have the the recent rains transformed your garden (or a field/garden nearby)?

Worship

Read Isaiah 55:6-13. How have you seen God's word bring new life?

Open in prayer (and song).

Word

Read John 15:1-8

The vine-metaphor is often used in the Old Testament. Read Psalm 80:8-18 and Isaiah 5:1-10 (you may also like to read other example e.g. Jer 2:21, Ezk. 15:1-8 etc.). If these are examples of wild or failed vines what does that tell us about the type of vine God plans to cultivate (i.e. what sort of community does God desire to build up)?

There is a "world play" we miss in the English translation: "*The Father 'cuts off' (airei) every dead branch; he 'trims' (kathairei) every fruit-bearing branch; indeed the disciples listening to Jesus are already 'clean' (katharoi, v. 3) because of the word Jesus has spoken to them*¹. Discuss the group's various responses to the idea of being cut off and thrown away.

NT. Wright comments: "*You get the knife either way; and that's precisely what*

postmodern spirituality doesn't want. ... We want to develop to our full potential, to be more fully, more truly ourselves. And we want this for ourselves, for our own enjoyment, so that we can be fulfilled and happy in ourselves." Do you agree with him?

In what ways has God pruned you? (An example of pruning is copied below).

What practical things do we do to "Abide in Christ" (Jn. 15:4)? (Verses 9-15 can be seen as a commentary on 1-8; you may find help there). Note how the Vine metaphor ties us to God and the community of faith.

Work

What is bothering you?

Oswald Chambers writes "*Abide in Me—in intellectual matters, in money matters, in every one of the matters that make human life what it is. ... Think of the things that take you out of abiding in Christ—'Yes, Lord, just a minute, I have got this to do; Yes, I will abide when once this is finished; when this week is over, it will be all right, I will abide then.'* Get a move on; begin to abide now. In the initial stages it is a continual effort until it becomes so much the law of life that you abide in Him unconsciously. Determine to abide in Jesus wherever you are placed. How can you submit those those things bothering you to the Lordship of Christ?

Pray for one another with 15:7 in mind.

¹Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 515).

"every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful"

"For almost ten years I had cherished a dream of starting a small missionary congregation within the inner-city. However, after years of exploration it seemed best to those in my churches hierarchy that permission not be granted for this endeavour. When I received the news it was a painful moment. ...Slowly I realised I needed to relinquish the image of myself as a radical pioneer in congregational renewal. Simultaneously with this letting go there came a surprise opportunity for me to join a pastoral team that would give me space in which I could foster peoples spirituality in individual and small group settings. For three years this is what I did with a real sense of fulfilment." Trevor Hudson in Signposts to Spirituality.

Trevor refers to this experience as a "little Easter"; an experience of God surprising us with new life in the midst of brokenness and despair. We could, perhaps, also view this experience as a God pruning Trevor for greater fruitfulness. Note, though, that we need to be careful about insisting that a painful experience someone else goes through is 'pruning'. It is usually best for the individual, perhaps with the loving guidance from a wise mentor, to come to that conclusion themselves.

A helpful way to see pruning is God, the 'gardener' lovingly removing the dead shoots (broken dreams, past hurts, selfish ambitions) so that they don't hinder new growth for God's glory.