

## “PROFITING FROM PAIN”

Isn't that title an oxymoron? How can pain possibly profit? No normal person enjoys pain and suffering. Suffering is a “downer.” How can there be an “up side” to pain? When the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians going through the fires of affliction he said that the Outcome is more precious than gold.” (I Peter 1:7) That's profitable pain!

**ILLUST.** We moved to a house that had a grape vine that had been allowed to proliferate unabated. The previous owner had built an arbor which the vine covered. The arbor had a bench beneath it and was a lovely place to sit and shade. The first autumn season rolled around and one of the members of the congregation that I pastored, brought with him to church a basket of luscious looking grapes as a gift. I said, “Thank you, but I have a large grape vine and I will have plenty of grapes. You may want to give these grapes to someone who does not have a grape vine.”

He laughed and said, Pastor, I've looked at your vine and you do not have many grapes and what you have are more like peas than grapes!” I was slightly offended but took his gift of grapes. When I got home that Sunday, the first thing I did was inspect my grape vine. To my dismay, I had lovely leaves but no grapes. I asked him what the problem was and he said, “The vine needs pruning.” He graciously volunteered to prune it which he did – drastically! He cut it back to within a few feet of where the vine came out of the ground. I gently fussed at him and he replied, “Pastor, you have got to decide whether you want foliage or fruit!” My grape arbor was ruined! But the next autumn I had a bountiful harvest of grapes. Pruning multiplies fruit literally and figuratively.

Jesus said that He was the True Vine and that His followers were branches. (John 15) He wants more fruit than foliage. The question is: are we bearing branches or barren branches? He expects His branches to bear abundant fruit and if it does not He prunes them. He said, “every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:2) The pruning process is needful and painful but profitable. Here is one cliché that is true: “No pain, no gain!”

**ILLUST.** A pastor in Bulgaria was arrested and imprisoned. His crime was preaching. He was sentenced to eight months. He did his eight months, got out, and wrote these words: "Both prisoners and jailers asked many questions, and I had a more fruitful ministry there than I could have had in church. God was better served by my presence in prison than if I had been free."

When we suffer it may be because the Heavenly Gardner is pruning His Branch to produce more fruit! Pruning is painful but profitable; and remember: the Gardner is never closer to us than when He is pruning us!

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