

# Suffering

## (Pruning/Fruitfulness Pendulum)

What fruit is God seeking to bring about in our lives during times of difficulty and trial?

### Scripture

Look at the following passages of Scripture and take note of what God is doing during times of trial.

Hebrews 12:4-11 (A good father disciplines his children)

John 15:1-8 (Jesus teaches about pruning)

What does it say God is often doing in trials?

What is our responsibility in order that we see good result in us during difficult times?

### Story

This following poem illustrates God's pruning and disciplining process in our lives to bring about fruitfulness. (It is an old poem that still uses the language of 'man', but it refers to all humans.)

#### **When God Wants To Drill A Man**

When God wants to drill a man,  
And thrill a man,  
And skill a man  
When God wants to mould a man  
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him,

And with mighty blows converts him  
Into trial shapes of clay which  
Only God understands;  
While his tortured heart is crying  
And he lifts beseeching hands!

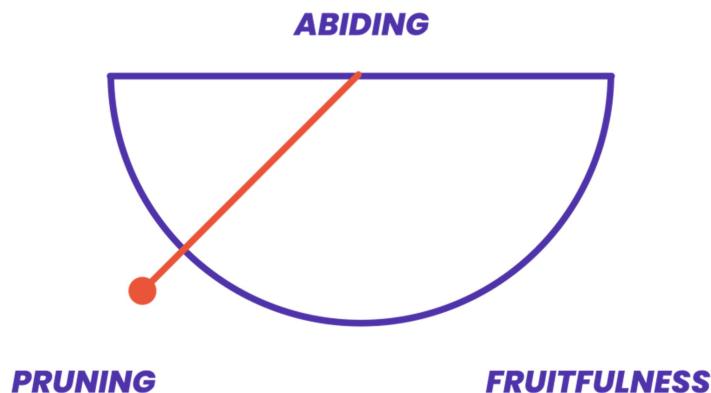
How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses,  
And which every purpose fuses him;  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendour out-  
God knows what He's about.  
– Anonymous

What strikes you from this poem?

Does any of it encourage you? Are there any bits you find difficult?

## Shape

The Pruning/Fruitfulness Pendulum illustrates the healthy and normal rhythm of a life in Christ.



A healthy life in Christ is one that is **abiding** in him, i.e. a life that is living in the Spirit both when the circumstances are easy and when they are hard. As we live by the Spirit, life has a natural swing, like a pendulum, between seasons of **pruning** and seasons of **fruitfulness**.

Seasons of **fruitfulness** are times where we are evidently living and experiencing lives that exhibit Christ's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. They can also be times of seeing God's kingdom at work in our lives – seeing people come to faith in Jesus or growing in their walk with him, seeing breakthrough in our own lives or the lives of others, seeing our prayers answered.

These seasons do not last forever as seasons of **pruning** will naturally come. These are seasons of difficulties and trials that God uses to raise things in us that are not like Christ, that we need to find freedom from or that we need to learn. These times can sometimes feel like we are going backwards in our faith rather than forwards, as we become aware for the first time of things that were hidden in our lives that did not resemble Christ. It is important to recognise that this is normal and healthy. In pruning times we need to attend to what God is doing and let him do his pruning work. We can have hope in these times of pruning that God is doing this to make us more fruitful.

In time, and as we allow ourselves to be trained by God, we will swing back into a time of fruitfulness, and will actually experience greater fruitfulness than ever before.

## So What?

Form groups with 1 or 2 of your closest, trusted friends in Missional Community. Take some time to consider The Pruning/Fruitfulness Pendulum, by discussing the following questions:

What season of the Pruning/Fruitfulness Pendulum do you feel like you are in: a season of fruitfulness, a season of pruning, or a transition from one to the other?

If you are in a season of pruning, what are some of the things that you feel God is seeking to train you in or free you from at this time?

If you are in a time of fruitfulness, what lessons have you learned in the past season of pruning that are resulting in this season of increased fruit?

After discussion, take some extended time to pray for one another and thank God for all the good he is doing both in the seasons of pruning and fruitfulness.

## **Grow Further**

### **Memory Verse:**

Hebrews 12:11

'No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields a harvest of righteousness and peace to those who have been trained by it.'

### **Other Bible passages:**

- Romans 8:28-30
- James 1:2-4
- 1 Peter 1:3-9
- Revelation 3:18-19

### **Other resources:**

*God is in the Pruning Business* - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l\\_GiD2qSLLg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_GiD2qSLLg)