

Pears, Pears, Everywhere

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

My family had a tree in our backyard that provided two things: shade and countless jars of pear preserves. One day, I asked my mother why she made so many jars every year. Her response was, "If I don't, they will start falling off the tree and go bad." With that, I went outside to take a look for myself. There were pears everywhere—so many, in fact, that the tree branches were beginning to sag and snap under the immense weight of their fruit. It looked to me like my mother's faithful picking was encouraging the tree to produce even more!

Jesus told his disciples that God acts as a gardener in the lives of those who claim him as Lord. He wants his followers to be abundant producers of good fruit, showing the world that they are children of God (see John 15:8). But this is not enough. Instead of simply harvesting the fruit that is produced, the Lord grabs a pair of pruning shears and begins to trim the branches. A little here, a little there, until he is satisfied with the end result.

This process of subtraction is a good thing. For it is in these times that God rids us of attitudes and actions that limit our effectiveness for the kingdom. In their place, he grants new opportunities to exhibit love, patience, kindness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). As these values are acted upon, what started out as subtraction becomes addition, and more fruit is produced than before the pruning.

If the branches are not pruned they may become weakened or stressed, and they will eventually snap. Once that occurs, the

branches will wither and die because they are not attached to the tree, leaving wasted fruit behind. But the result of a life lived wholeheartedly for Christ will be an abundance of fruit—fruit that will last.