

# The Refiner's Fire, Divine Pruning and the Prayer Movement

One of the nicest features of the first house Nancy and I owned was the beautiful rosebushes that surrounded the yard. The previous owner of the house loved to landscape, and those rosebushes were his pride and joy. Being a natural gardener herself, Nancy especially appreciated them as well.

One day, though, I came home from work and was absolutely shocked. Some vandal had decimated the rose bushes, leaving them hacked and disfigured. Who would do something like this, especially in broad daylight?

But when I walked into the house, Nancy seemed quite relaxed, so I assumed she hadn't seen what happened. That meant it was my job to break the bad news to her.

With some level of distress, I said to her, "Someone has destroyed the rose bushes!"

She just smiled and said, "No, the gardener was here today, and he pruned them."

I thought to myself, "That's what pruning looks like? Seriously? Pruning is brutal!"

Suddenly, the words of Jesus came alive to me: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2, ESV).

God's pruning is more painful than pleasant, but it is an act of love, making us less for the moment—sometimes quite radically less—in order to make more of us in the future.

Can you imagine how the branches feel about being pruned—hacked and cut back and chopped? But after a while, if they were sentient beings, they would know that pruning today means flourishing tomorrow.

So, yes, pruning is not pleasant. But it is necessary if we are to bear more fruit. As Jesus said, “every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”

If you want to grow and bear more fruit, you *will* be pruned. Count on it.

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It's the same principle when it comes to God coming as a refiner's fire.

As described by Malachi:

*“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years (Mal. 3:1–4, NIV).*

Gold and silver are thrown into this super-heated fire, precious metals that might look quite pure to the naked eye. But the fire brings the impurities to the surface for all to see—and the sight can be quite ugly.

That is what happens when God draws near to us with His holy fire (read Isa. 6). The fire purifies our lives, revealing the dross and burning out the impurities. Being purified by fire is not fun. Fire burns!

But God does this in order to cleanse us, not condemn us; to help us, not hurt us.

I had the extraordinary privilege of serving as a leader in the Brownsville Revival from the years 1996-2000. Contemporary church historians have called it the longest running local church revival in American history, drawing a cumulative attendance of several million people from more than 130 nations, with at least 300,000 different individuals responding to altar calls to get right with God.

Yet with this divine glory there was also divine fire.

Pastors would tell me, "I brought my people here because I thought they needed a fresh touch from God, but I was the first one to come forward and repent. God showed me the sin in my own life, and I feel as if I was born again all over again."

I can testify firsthand that the revival fires burned out a whole lot of dross in my own life, leading to deep cleansing and repentance.

I can also testify to seasons of divine pruning in my life where, after seeking the Lord earnestly with fasting and prayer, crying out for a major ministry breakthrough, I received at first what seemed to be the opposite of what I had been praying for.

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Instead of a major expansion of our work the Lord brought about a personal pruning in my life, cutting me back for the moment so that I could grow and produce much more fruit in the

years ahead. I am eternally grateful to God for those holy (and difficult) seasons.

But understanding what was happening—and remembering those rosebushes—is what helped me to embrace the divine process.

I believe something similar today is happening with the global prayer movement.

This past May, believers and intercessors around the world united in prayer for Israel, possibly mobilizing more prayer for Israel than at any one time in history.

Little did any of us know the hell that would break open in Israel later that same year, 2023.

And little did any of us know the hell that would break open in the global prayer movement, also in 2023, some of it within days of the Hamas massacre of Oct. 7.

But as painful as this process is and as much as sin is being revealed and purged, I see God's hand at work in the midst of it.

This is a time for purging. A time for purification. A time for refining.

But rather than the prayer movement falling apart or disintegrating, I believe it is God's intent for the movement to multiply.

Put another way, there is a division that is destructive and a division that brings growth. And if we will humble ourselves before the Lord and give ourselves unreservedly to His purposes, we can see good come out of evil and a divine plan unfold out of chaos.

So, pray this along with me: "Send Your refining fire, Lord! And start the work in me."

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