

***Invitation:* YOUR JOURNEY to ABUNDANCE**

Everywhere I travel in the world, I meet people who are realizing that spiritual abundance is not only possible but expected of every believer-and they don't want to settle for less. After reading *Secrets of the Vine*, a woman named Sarena jotted me a note: "I don't have another day to waste," she said. "I want to be a passionate Christian. I want to have an overflowing basket for God."

Maybe you're like Sarena. You sense a deeper destiny, one that you may have missed for months or even years. But now you feel the breezes of the Spirit. Maybe you see a picture of the extraordinary abundance that God has in mind for you, and you want it with all your heart. If so, then the book you're holding is especially for you.

I wrote *Secrets of the Vine* to show how God works in our lives to bring us from barrenness to fruitfulness for His glory. The book is based on Jesus' teachings in a vineyard the night before He died (found in John 15). Using the illustrations of a vinedresser, a vine, a branch, and fruit, Jesus painted a memorable word picture of God's ways in our lives, what He wants most from us every day, and how we can cooperate with Him to make it happen. If you haven't read this little book yet, I urge you to do so.

The *Secrets of the Vine Devotional* will take you, step by step, further into the life you want-the one God wants even more for you. Here you'll find thirty-one days' worth of personal mentoring, encouragement, and practical suggestions for nurturing your spiritual transformation.

A companion tool, the *Secrets of the Vine Journal*, has been created especially for use with this devotional. If you haven't thought of yourself as a spiritual journaler before, I urge you to take this important step. At the conclusion of each day's reading you'll notice an entry called "My Vineyard Journal." These daily prompters suggest questions and prayers to enrich your journaling experience.

In your journal keeping, don't worry about *how* you write-just write. Make each page an ongoing conversation with God. Keep your entries personal, on task, and true. You are in an amazing season of your life. Don't miss a minute of it!

I recommend that you continue your exploration with the *Secrets of the Vine Bible Study* or the *Secrets of the Vine Video Series*. These studies work well for personal or group use and will take you deeper into the biblical truths and personal applications of spiritual abundance.

By the time you finish this devotional, you'll know what God has been doing in your life ever since you became a Christian. You'll grasp what it means to experience abundant fruitfulness for God. You'll begin to see more lasting results from your life than you ever thought possible-and you'll know for certain that even more are on the way.

Join me on this joyful, life-changing journey today.

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, that it may bear more fruit.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

JOHN 15:1-2, 5, 8, 16

Dag 1 op Vrydag 1 Augustus 2008**THE GREAT EXCHANGE**

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Fathers commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full"

JOHN 15: 10 -11

This is a book about grapes as a metaphor for supernatural abundance in your life. Big, beautiful, juicy grapes-bushels of them! But since I'm from Georgia, where we grow a lot of peaches, could I talk about peaches first?

One spring years ago, when our family first moved out to the country, I heard about a prize-winning local orchard. "Famous Georgia peaches," my neighbour said proudly, "big as melons, sweet as nectar." But the first time I saw the orchard, I was shocked. It was early spring, with not a peach in sight, and under every tree a thicket of long, unsightly poles propped up each branch.

Had a twister come through? Had some invisible disease attacked a once-famous landmark? I didn't know. I went home thinking it looked more like a tree hospital than a famous orchard.

When I asked my neighbour what had befallen the orchard, he laughed. "Just wait a few months," he said. "You'll get the picture."

I went back to the orchard in midsummer ... and I got the picture.

The peaches were the largest, most beautiful I'd ever seen, and the crop was so heavy that the purpose of those poles became immediately clear. Without them, the sheer weight of ripening fruit would easily have snapped the branches.

As I walked through the rows of trees, I found myself praying.

Lord, may my life someday look like this orchard for Y our. May the fruit of my life be so heavy that You'll need angels to hold up the branches. And whatever You need to do in my life to make me a person who can produce that kind of abundance-Lord, please do it!

That spontaneous prayer is at the heart of this little book-a plea for supernatural productivity for God's kingdom, and a plea for His work in our lives to make it possible.

These are requests God promises to answer. But there's a catch. To get to the life God has in mind for you, you have to be willing to make an exchange. You have to be willing to go against the grain of what you may have assumed to be true, to be willing to respond to God in new ways that won't feel at all safe or smart, at least to begin with.

Bumper crops don't just naturally happen. So in this book, where our conversation is set in a vineyard, we'll be talking about things like mud and mildew, cleaning and restraining, and cutting away perfectly good growth. We'll also be talking about trying again in areas you may have tried hard in before.

But please don't hear the words and lose the picture. The words are about how God tends your life. The picture is what He's preparing you to produce-a harvest so extraordinary that you'll need His arms underneath you just to hold up your branch!

Are you willing to cooperate with how God works in your life at a deeper level? If so, then you are signing up for the great exchange. Jesus promised it to His disciples in the vineyard the last night He was alive. Jesus said you and I can expect to have this rarest abundance of all-an abundance of the heart-as we produce a harvest for Him. He said we can have it in full and should settle for nothing less.

He called it joy.... *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that*

your joy may be full

As you go through your day today, try this: Pull out all your old assumptions, worn-out expectations, and broken ideas about how God works in your life. Empty the junk drawers of your spirit.

Then find a moment to stand in the presence of Jesus and lay down your worthless collection. Tell Him it's time you made the great exchange. Accept His offer. And set out with me on the path toward a joy that remains.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: "Lord, lead me into a life of extraordinary, joyful abundance for You. Help me to desire it passionately. Today, show me a glimpse of what my harvest could be like by this time next year."

*Joy comes from seeing the complete fulfilment of the specific purpose
for which I was created and born again,
not from successfully doing something of my own choosing.*

OSWALD CHAMBERS

Dag 2 op Saterdag 2 Augustus 2008**PICTURES from the VINEYARD**

'I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. I am the vine, you are the branches. "

JOHN 15:¹, 5

If you've read *Secrets of the Vine*, you know that Jesus chose a dramatic moment and a memorable word picture to tell His best friends what they could expect in their future. The conversation occurred only minutes after He had dashed all their hopes for earthly glory and power (John 13, 14) and only hours before He was to be crucified (John 19).

On their late-night walk from the upper room to Gethsemane, Jesus had led His disciples into a vineyard outside the city walls. There, Jesus paused. As torches flickered in the night air, His friends waited. Perhaps they wondered what else remained to be said that they could possibly want to hear.

But surrounded by carefully tended rows of grapes, Jesus began a most surprising conversation.

'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, that it may bear more fruit. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit. "(John 15: 1-2, 5, 8)

Think of how those words must have fallen on their ears. Instead of talk of legions of angels, Jesus talked about plants. Instead of insurrection, He spoke repeatedly of fruit bearing. And He told them that an ongoing relationship with Him was not only possible, but would be the key to producing more fruit.

Much more.

Notice how clearly Jesus identified what each part of the grape plant represented:

The vine is Jesus. The vine of the grape is the trunk that brings sap up from the roots into the branches.

The branches are His followers. Carefully tended branches grow out along trellises from both sides of the vine and produce the grapes.

The vineyard keeper is God the Father. The vinedresser in a vineyard has one purpose-to work on each branch individually so that it will bear the finest harvest of grapes.

The fruit is the good works of Jesus' disciples.

Are you beginning to see why Jesus left His friends with this picture of the vineyard? Here are several important truths from the vineyard that can change your life today:

1. *The vineyard shows you God's purpose for you.* Jesus wanted His followers to remember that we have one overarching purpose on earth-to bear fruit for God's glory.
2. *The vineyard shows that you have been created and are regularly being tended to succeed in this purpose.* The fact is, with the proper care, a grape branch is a wonder of the natural world-perfectly suited for exceptionally high crop yields year after year.
3. *The vineyard shows you how God will work in your life to achieve His purpose.* Clearly, the Father's activities in the vineyard are focused on increasing our output for Him. The Vinedresser is active, not passive; present, not absent; committed, not casual or careless.
4. *The vineyard shows that we are created for a living relationship with God.* Just as Jesus had earlier described Himself as the Good Shepherd, here He again chose an image that conveys a mysteriously interconnected relationship: The Vine gives its life to the branch; the ever present, ever involved Vinedresser tends the branch; the branch produces valuable fruit.
5. *The vineyard is proof that God wants you to be clear, not confused, about His ways in your life.* Unfortunately, many Christians misread His activities behind the scenes in their lives, and therefore slide into doubt and mistrust. Or they assume that real friendship with

God is a spiritual accomplishment reserved for monks and missionaries.

But Jesus came to tell you and me the "secrets" of God at work in His vineyard. I encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to learn about fruitfulness today. And listen for the footsteps of your Father, the Vinedresser, in the rows of your life.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: Up to now, what have I imagined Jesus wanted from my life? How might my thinking change, based on the truths Jesus revealed that night in the vineyard?

Speak in my words today, think in my thoughts, and work in all my deeds.

And seeing that it is Your gracious will to make use even of such weak human instruments in the fulfilment of Your mighty purpose for the world let my life today be the channel through which some little portion of Your divine love and pity may reach the lives that are nearest to my own.

JOHN BAILLIE

We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal

2 CORINTHIANS 4:¹⁸

Dag 3 op Sondag 3 Augustus 2008**WHAT IS FRUIT?**

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful

TITUS 3:14

Somebody says banana, you think monkey. Somebody says apple, you think homemade apple pie or maybe school lunch.

What do you think of when we talk about bearing fruit?

Fruit is God's picture of eternal results stemming from your life.

Paul's instruction to Titus in today's verse shows what the Bible means when it talks about spiritual fruit. It's nearly synonymous with good works. Biblically speaking, we could define fruit as a good work that pleases God and that is done with an appropriate motive. In his first letter, Peter exhorted the early Christians to live in such a way that even hostile unbelievers would be persuaded to glorify God when they saw their good works (1 Peter 2:11-12).

So fruit is the yield of your life. Fruit is leading others to the Lord (John 4:35-38)-and it's much more. Fruit is teaching and encouraging other believers (Romans 1: 13). Fruit is helping or giving (Philippians 4:16-17). Fruit is genuine worship (Hebrews 13:15). Some include fruit as the beautiful outward expression of the inward work of the Spirit in your character to make you more like Christ (Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:3-8). Fruit, then, is any good work that brings glory to God (Titus 3:14).

The big difference between physical and spiritual fruit is that spiritual fruit blesses you now *and* lasts into eternity. Jesus invited His disciples to bear the fruit that would "remain" (John 15:16).

Yet even though you and I are chosen for just such productivity, our lives can easily add up to something tragically less. The truth is, we can struggle unknowingly for our entire lives against what God wants, all the while assuming we are living according to His will.

A grapevine's natural tendency, you see, is *not* abundance. In fact, one expert describes the plant's natural growing tendency as "undisciplined, scattered, and dispersed." Left to itself, a grape plant rambles through the underbrush. It straggles over rocks and climbs up any handy tree trunk. In the process, it manages to produce only small, often bitter fruit.

But in cultivation, the picture changes completely. One grape plant can easily yield sixty large, sweet clusters of grapes each season. One life can, by God's grace, be a trophy for His glory.

Take the life of country preacher John Bunyan. In seventeenth century England, he spent twelve years of his life in jail for preaching the gospel. When he was offered his freedom on the condition that he stop evangelizing, Bunyan replied, "If I were out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow with the help of God."

Bunyan used his prison years to allow God to cultivate his branch. He wrote *Pilgrims Progress*, a spiritual classic that has been leading thousands to Christ every year since it was published. What Bunyan wanted more than freedom was a life that mattered for God.

Looking back on his imprisonment, Bunyan said, "If I were fruitless, it mattered not who commended me; but if I were fruitful, I cared not who did condemn."

Notice how Bunyan evaluated his success. Were his efforts producing results for eternity? Then he was an unqualified success. His only goal was God's goal for him. That's how you produce spiritual fruit, my friend!

As you look over your life today, to what degree would you say it is entirely given over to accomplishing what God wants? Are you willing to submit to God's hand, to let Him cultivate

you-even through adversity-so that you can bear fruit for Him?

If so, then you're on your way to a vigorous and purposeful life, magnificently weighted down with clusters of the most beautiful fruit you've ever seen.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *How much do I truly desire fruitfulness? What can I point to in my life right now that is a sure sign of fruit that brings God glory?*

The one thing He commands us as His branches is to bear fruit.

Live to bless others, to testify of the life and the love there is in Jesus.

In faith and obedience give your whole life

to that which Jesus chose us for and appointed us to--fruit bearing.

Think of His electing us to this, accepting your appointment as coming from Him

Who always gives us everything He demands of us.

ANDREW MURRAY

Dag 4 op Maandag 4 Augustus 2008**LET *in the* LIGHT**

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

EPHESIANS 2:10

One day a funny thought came to me: Could I improve an elephant? I gave it my best shot, but ... no luck. For what it was created to do and where it thrives, the elephant is a work of pure genius! I tried to come up with improvements for other wonders of creation—a daffodil, a sunset, a porpoise, a strawberry. Still no luck. Then reality hit. How could I, one of God's created beings, improve on something my Creator had already perfected? His creation is simply miracle upon miracle, repeated over and over again.

And *you* are that kind of miracle too. You are God's intentional, highly cherished creation. Paul says it beautifully—"We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2: 10). Not only are you a masterpiece, you are a masterpiece with a mission—"created in Christ Jesus for good works" (v. 10).

I wonder if you feel like God's workmanship today, created specifically for a life of significance and purpose. I hope you do. So many Christians I know do not. They feel permanently burdened by regrets, injuries, or shame from past events or current shortcomings. They feel more like a bruised cull or a sorry mess than God's own one-of-a-kind marvel, created in Jesus for good works.

On a recent flight I sat next to Denny, an exceptionally successful businessman and former youth group leader. Later that day he'd be putting ink to a multimillion-dollar contract with NASA. But inside he felt like one big mistake. He told me his third marriage had just collapsed. "I've strayed so far from God and I'm so messed up, I don't know if I can ever come back," he shared with considerable anguish. "Do you think God can ever use me again?"

I told him it was not in his power to destroy what God had created him to do. "And right now, in this airplane," I told Denny, "God is at work in your life to help you reclaim your future."

You, too, may feel bent by past failures, broken by besetting sins, blighted by shame or guilt. But you are still alive in Christ. The sap of eternity still courses through you. When a branch in Christ gets bent or broken, it doesn't die. New growth is waiting to spring forth. Your branch may never look quite the same, but you are still *created in Christ Jesus for good works*. There's no Plan B. God's picture of your future is still a life brimming with extraordinary abundance....

If you choose it.

I'm aware that if you feel more like a mistake than a miracle today, the thought of actually bearing eternal fruit—and lots of it—for God's glory may seem highly improbable. You do not expect a life of abundance, so why prepare for it? My friend, you need to face your thinking for what it is—crippling unbelief. Today it spreads over your life like a black cloud keeping out the sun of God's pleasure and strength.

Of course you and I have sinned. Of course we are deeply flawed.

Yet only misdirected pride or an inadequate grasp of God's character and power can separate us from our created purpose. When we respond in humility and repentance, God is ready to pursue that one-off-a-kind purpose in us, starting now.

If I've described your feelings today, I ask you to do something.

Let the Lord's truth dispel that black cloud. Let the light of the truth reach your branch today.

And then prepare to flourish!

Here are three truths of fruit bearing that you should remind yourself of each day:

- *I am Gods workmanship.*
- *I have been created in Christ Jesus for good works.*
- *Gods plan for me is a purposeful and abundant life.*

Write these life-changing declarations down. Think about them.

Own them. They describe the life God made you for. And He's waiting now to see if you still want it.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *What "black cloud" belief about myself do I need to put aside without delay so I can receive the life-giving light of God?*

*I thank God for my handicaps,
for through them I have found myself my work, and my God*

HELEN KELLER

Dag 5 op Dinsdag 5 Augustus 2008**RESULTS MATTER**

"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

JOHN 15:8

Imagine you're in an Italian hilltop village four hundred years ago. It's a bright autumn day, perfect for the annual wine growers' festival. For as long as families here can remember, townspeople have filled the square on Saturday of harvest week for the yearly vinedressers' competition. Honours for the master vinedresser will go to the grower whose best branch can bring in the most grapes.

The crowd cheers as the first contestant enters the square. His pack animal carries a basket piled high with fruit. When he arrives in the square, you watch him lift his basket onto an enormous scale. "Ah! Bellissimo!" people around you exclaim.

As the parade of men and loaded burros continues into the square, the crowd buzzes excitedly. What a year for grapes! Several of the growers need a second basket to haul in their entries. The competition will definitely be close.

When the last grower, white-haired Ernesto, turns the corner into town, the crowd cheers. Then gasps. The burro following him is weighted down with a basket on each side, *each one* overflowing with purple clusters. Spontaneous applause sweeps the square. The man next to you shouts, "How does Ernesto do it?"

But wait! Another burro tethered to the first is rounding the corner. And it carries two more baskets, each brimming with more beautiful grapes!

The crowd erupts. Men, women, and children shout, "Magnifico! Ernesto is the winner! Ernesto will be remembered always!" It seems there'll be no need for a scale this year to know whom to honour as master vinedresser....

Can you guess why I'm telling you this story? In the vineyard that night, Jesus revealed precisely what gives God glory. It is not your intentions. It isn't merely how hard you try. It is how much fruit comes from your branch - "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear *much fruit*."

I want you to notice the word *much*. Clearly; results matter to God. Each branch bears a different amount of fruit, and all fruit honours God. But God's greatest glory comes from the ones who bear *much* fruit.

Does it surprise you to know that *quantity* matters to God? We're used to the fact that results count in sports or business.

Yet when it comes to our faith, we balk. In fact, in my experience most Christians are likely to say something like, "It's your heart that counts," or "I'm only responsible to try hard."

But consider Jesus' parable about the ten minas in Luke 19: 12-27. When the nobleman in Jesus' story returned and called his servants to give an accounting of the money he had entrusted them with, the man who multiplied the master's money the most was rewarded the most. The nobleman's response makes perfect sense in the world of business, but-let me warn you-it rattles most believers to the core.

If you look closely at Jesus' teaching in John 15, you'll notice four levels of fruit bearing:

- Level 1. No fruit ("Every branch in Me that *does not bear fruit*, " v. 2, emphasis added).
- Level 2. Fruit ("every branch that bears *fruit*," v. 2).
- Level 3. More fruit ("that it may bear *more fruit*," v. 2).
- Level 4. Much fruit ("bears *much fruit*," vv. 5, 8).

Where do you think your level of fruit bearing is at this very moment? If the Master

Vinedresser harvested your branch this year for His glory, how much honour would He receive? A lot? Some? A little? None?

If you sense that you are among those branches that could bear a lot more fruit, take heart! God cares so much about the outcome of your life that you can count on Him to work continuously in your life toward a harvest of extraordinary abundance and great acclaim for Him.

The secrets of the vineyard that you'll learn in the weeks to come will show you how the Master Vinedresser is at work to move you from one level up to the next and then the next. Once you accept the responsibility of cooperating with Him to bear a lot of fruit for God, you'll begin to see the beautiful results of a life that is destined to add lustre to His name for eternity.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *How do I feel about my current level of fruit bearing? What do I see in my life that leads me to conclude I'm producing at this level?*

*It is God who works in you
both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

Dag 6 op Woensdag 6 Augustus 2008**VISIBLE PROOF**

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

I PETER 2:11-12

Most greatly used men and women in God's kingdom can point to a day in their life when they made a formal decision to live for God's glory.

One Sunday afternoon in 1951, in a little bungalow in Los Angeles, a young married couple signed their names to a "transfer of ownership." Their dreams, their possessions and passions, their abilities and liabilities, their years—all were signed over to God by the stroke of a pen. No one witnessed the signing. And Bill and Vonette Bright had no idea what would come next. But God did.

Fifty years later, the student outreach they started—Campus Crusade for Christ—has grown into sixty separate ministries worldwide, touching almost every segment of society. A pamphlet Dr. Bright wrote, called *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* has been used over three billion times. Campus Crusade's evangelistic film, *Jesus*, has been viewed by 4 billion people in 233 countries, resulting in more than 121 million people coming to salvation.

One stroke of the pen...

How much of the ownership of your life have you consciously given over to bringing God credit in this world? The very fact that you're reading this book means that you sincerely desire to serve God in a significant way. Yet our words and actions don't serve God unless our purposes belong to Him as well. For example, we can mistake feeling fulfilled and significant in Christian service as proof that we're glorifying God.

So how can we know we're bringing God public glory, not just living a pretty good life? Here's a simple way to think about it:

God is glorified when an onlooker—particularly an unbeliever—observes you sacrificially doing something good for a recipient and is compelled to say, "Thank God for what that person did! Who is the wonderful God behind this?"

Jesus put it this way: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5: 16).

I wonder today if you or your church has ever intentionally set out to meet specific, unmet needs with only two requirements: 1) You get nothing in return (maybe not even a "warm fuzzy"); and 2) God's reputation receives a huge boost. It strikes me that if you went around the neighbourhoods of most churches and asked, "Have you ever thanked God for that church up the street?" you'd come away shocked at how many would say no.

A couple of days ago I spoke to Dr. Bright on the phone. Now in declining health and on oxygen support, he's *still* focusing his energies on touching the world for God.

I remember the day in my life when I decided to live for fruit that glorifies God. What a breakthrough that was for me! I urge you to formalize your own decision today. If you've made one in the past, affirm it again before you go on. Nothing you learn in this book will help you unless you have given yourself away to God and to the wonderful pursuit of *His* glory.

Join me, then, in this important declaration:

o God, I want only what You want for my life. From this day forward, I will measure success, achievement, and fulfilment by doing good works that bring You glory. Today I sign over ownership of my life to You, asking only that You will use me to show the world what a wonderful

God You are!

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *Write your prayer in your journal; then sign and date it. Place a copy of your prayer in a prominent place. Carry a copy with you.*

The Christian should resemble a fruit tree, not a Christmas tree. For the gaudy decorations of a Christmas tree are only tied on, whereas fruit grows on a fruit tree.

JOHN STOTT

Dag 7 op Donderdag 7 Augustus 2008**A TROPHY LIFE**

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

It was one for the national record book, a believe-it-or-not whopper that had been told and retold for a thousand years. Every Jewish child lad grown up hearing the story of how Moses commissioned twelve of his champion warriors to scout the Promised Land. And how, when they returned to camp, they brought back a most amazing trophy. ...

One duster of grapes so huge it took two men just to carry it! Think I'm exaggerating? The Bible says, "They came to the valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole" (Numbers 3:23). For Israel, that one enormous cluster stood as proof that God's best for His children would always be shockingly greater than anything they could imagine for themselves.

God's work in our lives can produce a harvest like that, too-remarkable, unheard-of, obviously supernatural in origin, memorable for generations.

Now that you know what real fruit looks like (something you do that brings God glory) and that results matter, you're ready to discover, perhaps for the first time, your own level of fruitfulness. Yesterday I asked you how much glory your branch is bringing God. Let me ask you now, if the Vinedresser came by your branch today, collected all the dusters of grapes, and put them in His basket, how full would it be?

Give the question some thought, then check the statement that best shows what you think God would see as the current level of fruitfulness in your life:

Level 1. God would see *no fruit* in my basket.

Level 2. God would see *some fruit* in my basket.

Level 3. God would see *quite a bit of fruit* in my basket.

Level 4. God would see *a lot of fruit* in my basket.

How do you feel about your answer? Encouraged? Frustrated? Embarrassed?

Take the time you need today to write out in your journal your answers to some important questions:

- Why did you place yourself where you did? Describe the circumstances in your life that lead you to believe you are bearing fruit--or not.

What are several ways you can see yourself bearing new fruit in the future? Based on your gifts and talents, what kinds of good works or acts of ministry do you long for or sense that God might lead you to do?

- How motivated are you to move to the next level of fruitfulness and what do you believe it will take to get there? Are you willing?

I hope that this week's readings have stirred in you an increasing desire for extraordinary fruitfulness for God. In weeks to come, we're going to explore together how God comes alongside of your life to help you take the next step toward greater productivity and fulfillment.

Remember, what God has in mind for you is so far beyond what you are experiencing right now that you can't possibly imagine it. You-one magnificent branch in the Father's vineyard-were made for abundance, God desires it, and He is actively at work in your life right now to bring it about.

Because what He sees when He sees you is a trophy life for Him.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *"Lord, change me with the truth, even the truth I don't want to face. Use my answers to today's questions to move me toward a life that honours You and brings You pleasure.*
"

*He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption,
but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.
And let us not grow weary while doing good,
for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

GALATIANS 6:8-9

*Let me offer You in sacrifice the service
of my thoughts and my tongue,
but first give me what I may offer You.*

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Dag 8 op Vrydag 8 Augustus 2008**FROM BARREN to BOUNTIFUL**

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction;

For whom the LORD loves He corrects,

Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

PROVERBS 3:11-12

Rosie, a high-energy professional, was telling me about her first "career" as a teenage berry picker. "We used to get up at the crack of dawn to catch the farm bus out to the fields. We worked long hours for not a lot of money. By the time we fell into bed at night we never wanted to see another berry. 'Course, then we dreamed about nothing but berries all night long!"

"So how long did your career in berries last?" I asked.

"Oh, about a week," she said. I expressed surprise. Turns out Rosie hit a career snag named Vince. "He was so cure," she told me, laughing. "And I was young. I spent more time chasing him than picking berries. One afternoon, my row boss noticed my bucket was empty again. That was it. She said, 'Rosie, honey, why don't you sleep in tomorrow. Your berry season is over.'"

Plenty of adults I know can identify with Rosie's unpromising start in the working world. Unfortunately, too many Christians can also identify with a spiritual basket which keeps coming up empty.

Jesus told His disciples, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away" (John 15:2). Notice that fruit bearing is optional. Unlike a grape plant, a believer can decide not to bear fruit. Let me ask you-have you gone a day, a week, or even months when you chose to live in such a way that your life produced no fruit for God? Christian audiences around the world overwhelmingly identify with that question, agreeing that barren periods have occurred in their spiritual lives.

But what does the Vinedresser do when a branch in His vineyard chooses to remain barren? Fruitlessness certainly isn't His will for us. Does "takes away" in this verse mean that, like an impatient row boss, God gives up on you and puts you in the discard pile?

My personal understanding of this question came unexpectedly.

One day I met a second-generation vineyard owner from California, and I asked him why some branches don't bear fruit. He explained that some branches fall from the trellis and trail along the ground. They get covered with dust and mud and soon become diseased.

"What do you do then?" I asked. "Cut them off?"

"Oh no!" he exclaimed. "Branches are much too valuable for that. We go through the rows looking for them. We carefully lift them up, wash them off, and tie them back to the trellis. Pretty soon they're thriving again."

His comments drove me to re-examine the Bible text, and what I found there made sense for the first time. You see, a better translation of the Greek verb *airo-here* rendered "take away" -is "take up" or "lift up." *Airo* is the same word Jesus used when He told the lame man, "*Take up your bed, and go to your house*" (Matthew 9:6).

Do you see the picture now too? For the Christian, sin is like dirt covering your leaves. It makes your branch sick and keeps you from bearing fruit. God grieves when your branch is barren, not only because He's seeing no fruit but also because you're not thriving. But He won't throw you away. Instead, He kneels by your branch, gently cleanses you, then lifts you back up to a productive, God-honouring life.

This is the first secret of the vine: *When we choose to languish in sin, God intervenes to motivate us to stop sinning and begin bearing .fruit again.*

The Bible describes this process as discipline or chastening. But you and I could call it "love lifting me."

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *How does the idea that God might be disciplining me make me feel?*

He who keeps instruction is in the way of lift, but he who refuses correction goes astray

PROVERBS 10:17

Man still wishes to be happy even when he so lives as to make happiness impossible.

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Dag 9 op Saterdag 9 Augustus 2008**JOHNNY *in* SLEEPERS**

This is what the LORD says--your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. '
ISAIAH 48:17-18, NIV

Mom and Dad have tucked Johnny in for the night and curled up on the couch for TV and some quiet conversation ... and then Johnny pads into the room tugging on his sleepers. After Dad makes sure his little boy doesn't need or want anything--except *not* to stay in bed--Johnny gets sent back to bed with a reprimand. Mom and Dad settle back.

Five minutes later, Johnny is standing in the doorway again, thumb in mouth.

This time Johnny gets a swat. In fact, over the next forty-five minutes Johnny gets quite a few swats as the scenario repeats itself over and over. *Why can't Johnny get it through his head, the exasperated parents wonder, that if he gets out of bed he'll experience unhappy consequences?* Obviously, Johnny believes something that isn't true. But what? That the swats are not connected to his behaviour? That next time his parents won't notice? That a specific bedtime for kids is a bad idea?

I've noticed that we Christians can be a lot like Johnny in sleepers. We keep padding into trouble because we can't see--or refuse to see--any connection between our short-sighted behaviours and any distress we might be experiencing.

To show you what I mean, I've asked audiences all over the world to give me their frank assessment on three closely linked issues. Here's what they've told me:

- When I've asked, "What percentage of Christians do you believe are in each of the four levels of fruit bearing?" audiences have repeatedly estimated that at any given time up to 65 percent of believers are bearing no fruit for God--not even one grape.
- The same audiences estimate that most Christians do not believe that God actively disciplines His children when they stray. Putting that observation in vineyard terms, most Christians assume the Vinedresser does nothing when He sees that their branch is withering and unfruitful.
- Which leads naturally to their final observation: Three-fourths of all Christians don't make any connection between unaddressed sin in their lives and personal distress or painful circumstances they may be experiencing.

These statements are truly sobering. Since we know that God wants a huge harvest, but we observe that the majority of His branches are not producing fruit, we must conclude that God's intervening discipline is widespread and intensifying.

Meet Paul, a university student. He told me, "Honestly, Bruce, I don't think God is dealing with me now because I'm still sinning a lot." Later, Paul admitted that his life was in a downward spiral and that he frequently prayed that God would fix his negative circumstances and feelings. But he is behaving like Johnny in sleepers. He is making no connection between his increasingly stressful experience and God's response to his sin. And rather than change his behaviour, Paul keeps asking God to stop what He is doing to address the problem. As you'd guess, Paul's prayers don't seem to get results.

Do you recognize yourself in these statements? Have you been misinterpreting unwanted circumstances and emotions as random events when they are actually God's discipline in your life?

If so, get ready for quite an awakening. In the days ahead, you'll learn more about how you can cooperate with God to step out of discipline and into a new season of spiritual plenty.

It will be one of the best moves you ever make. A friend told me about his experience in discipline: "I know God wasn't pleased with my choices back then, but you know, I wasn't pleased with them either. I didn't have peace. My life just didn't count for much. What in the world was I thinking!"

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: "Lord, please reveal to me any wrong beliefs, behaviours, or attitudes that are blinding me to what You're trying to do in my life. I want to know-and live-the truth. "

Discipline puts back in its place that something in us which should serve but wants to rule.
ANONYMOUS

Dag 10 op Sondag 10 Augustus 2008**DEGREES of INTERVENTION**

You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." HEBREWS 12:5-6

Hebreërs 12:⁵ *En julle het die vermaning heeltemal vergeet wat tot julle as seuns spreek: My seun, ag die tugtiging van die Here nie gering nie en beswyk nie as jy deur Hom bestraf word nie; ⁶ want die Here tugtig hom wat Hy liefhet, en Hy kasty elke seun wat Hy aanneem.*

For many of us, the idea that God actively disciplines us comes as an uncomfortable surprise. *Why would God want to cause me pain?* we wonder. *I thought He loved me!* That's why understanding the hows and whys of discipline is critical if we're going to flourish in God's vineyard.

In our passage in Hebrews today, we find several key principles:

Gods discipline is personal applied with just the individual branch in mind. If you're a parent, you know that what motivates one child may not even get another's attention. The Vinedresser works in your life in the same way.

Gods discipline is purposeful, steering us away from sin and toward abundance.

Gods discipline is progressive, starting with the least pressure necessary. In today's passage, three levels or degrees of intervention are set forth. God begins with:

- Degree 1-rebuke (*bestraf*) (v. 5). Like any loving father, God doesn't enjoy causing us pain of any kind. That's why His Spirit first prompts you: "You really should stop that now. You know I'm not pleased with what you're doing." We hear God's rebuke in a word of Scripture, through another person, by a prick of the conscience, or by the direct conviction of the Holy Spirit.

But if we don't respond, He moves from rebuke to:

- Degree 2-chastening (*tugtig*) (v. 6). Here we experience emotional turmoil and increasing pressure, both internally and externally. Circumstances seem set against us. Our spiritual life seems permanently in the doldrums. God is using increasing discomfort to get us to stop our harmful behavior.

However, if we persist in rebelling, the intensity of discipline...

Increases again:

- Degree 3-scourging(*kasty*) (v. 6). Scourging is severe pain or trauma intended to make further straying more and more unbearable. *Scourge* is the same word the Gospels use to describe how the Romans whipped Jesus before His execution (John 19:1). It might have shocked you to read that "every son whom He receives" experiences scourging. That means if you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you have undoubtedly been scourged.

At this level of rebellion, you are probably living in open sin and wilfully disregarding what you know God wants. You haven't responded to rebuke or chastening. Therefore, God resorts to severe pain to get your attention. In 1 Corinthians 11: 17-32, Paul reports on the misery, illness, and even death (v. 30) that has come to a church body because of continual, serious, wilful sin among its members. Clearly, the Father takes long-term sin very seriously, and He *will* act.

My friend, I know that *rebuke*, *chasten*, and *scourge* are not likable words. They don't sell books or attract newcomers to church. Yet discipline in God's family is full of promise and hope. In fact, every word is couched in relationship: "You have forgotten the exhortation that speaks to you as *sons* ..." (12:5) says the writer of Hebrews. And "... *whom the Lord loves* He

chastens" (v. 6).

If you're tangled up in serious sin today, your Father's first desire IS that you stop it. That's where the life you really want starts. All day long, Your Father will be speaking to you as a son or daughter. And He won't give up, even when He hurts.

MY VINEYARD JOURNAL: *Can I look back and see a time when God was disciplining me on one of these levels (rebuke, chastening, scourging)? Did I recognize it as Gods discipline then?*

Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die.

PROVERBS 15:10

Dag 11 op Maandag 11 Augustus 2008**THE PERFECT DISCIPLINARIAN**

*We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now **no** chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

HEBREWS 12:9-11

Chandra, a doctoral student from India, told me she nearly always chokes on the second word of the Lord's Prayer. She loves Jesus, but thinking of God as Father? That's difficult. Her own father molested her from the time she was four until she ran away at fifteen.

So many today have grown up in destructive homes. I think of Will, whose father took physical punishment to such extremes that Will still walks with a limp. And Helen, who grew up in a home where parental discipline vanished the day her father walked out, never to return.

There's something about discipline that brings us right to the big questions about God the Father: What is His nature? What are His motives? What is His record? Can He be trusted with our hearts and lives?

The writer of Hebrews understood that although earthly fathers aren't perfect, God is. If we listen to our flawed earthly fathers, he argued, why don't we give the utmost respect and heed to our perfect heavenly Father?

Today I want you to open your heart to a life-changing truth: God is the perfect disciplinarian. Every time He intervenes to free you from a destructive choice, His action is lovingly and wisely custom-suited to your need. For example:

- *His methods are perfect.* God never abuses or heedlessly injures His children. He's never too harsh or too lenient. God has unlimited options. He uses people, circumstances, and events - and if we resist one, He can and will rise up another.
- *His motives are perfect.* Our Father doesn't lose His temper. He doesn't release His rage on a straying child. He doesn't exact payment or even the score. He is never unkind and receives no personal satisfaction when He disciplines us.
- *His commitment is perfect.* God will pro actively pursue us until we start cleaning up our act. He values our obedience more than our comfort-or His. He will discipline us even if we don't believe He will, even if we turn our backs on Him.

Of course, not all inconvenience, frustration, doubt, and suffering are God-induced. We live in a fallen world where evil people, disease, and natural disasters can strike at any time. Yet the Bible makes it clear that God will even use suffering to get our attention.

Do you see it? Your heavenly Father is compelled by love to intervene in your life when you insist on behaviours that sabotage your present and your future.

Does it feel good to you? Not at all.

Does your Father *want* to cause you discomfort or anguish? Of course not.

Will your Father stop pursuing you with His best? Not even when you break His heart!

As you go about your day, let these wonderful truths of your Father's love remain in your thoughts:

- *My Father loves me.*
- *My Father is patiently seeking my best.*
- *My Father will never give up on me.*

Ask your Father to take these words about His nature and intentions deep into your

memories, thoughts, and emotions. And ask Him to change you with the truth.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *When I think of God as my Father, what feelings am I most likely to experience? Will these feelings help or hinder when He disciplines me?*

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:16-17

Dag 12 op Dinsdag 13 Augustus 2008

OLD BUSINESS

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

PSALM 51:10

Scientists say that most chemical waste on our planet ends up being dumped into holes in the ground. Once these poisons seep into the soil and taint water supplies, serious damage can result. And the toxic threat can last for decades, even centuries.

All of us carry trash from the past into our lives in Christ. By trash I mean destructive behaviours, hurtful attitudes, or unresolved conflicts. Often we try to keep these sins buried like toxic waste, hoping we can keep them deep enough that they won't affect us, hoping no one will notice, hoping above all that they will eventually disappear.

But they don't. Over time, they affect other areas of our lives, often in surprising ways. We flounder in relationships. We can't seem to get anything out of church. We lose interest in Bible reading. Our spiritual development seems sidelined. Perhaps our health suffers. Real fruitfulness for God seems permanently out of reach, and we don't know why. I remember sitting on a hillside in Southern Oregon when I was in my late twenties. The early morning sun slanted across neatly tended pear orchards. It was a beautiful spot-but I was in desperate days with the Lord. For some time I had felt that I couldn't break through invisible barriers in my personal life and ministry. That morning I prayed, *Lord, if there is anything in my past that hinders our relationship, let me know now.*

Then I took out a yellow legal pad and began writing down the things that came to mind. Three pages later I was still writing. It was the longest list of unfinished personal business I'd ever seen.

Have you been in such a place? If so, then you know that a mountain of reluctance, rationalization, and fear rose up to keep me from actually doing something about it.

But with God's help I followed through. I made phone calls. I made confessions and asked for forgiveness. I acted on old, forgotten commitments. In time every piece of "trash" was disposed of and I began to experience a deeply settled confidence, a cleanness of heart, and a revitalized emotional and spiritual life.

My friend Chuck Colson has said, "One of the great myths of Christianity is that once a person is converted, they never sin again. On the contrary, we're fighting a constant battle. It's like we're running up a hill that's well-greased-you make it a couple of steps forward and then you slide back."

Every day the Vinedresser is ready to help us cleanse ourselves of musty old sins that are polluting our spirit and preventing genuine abundance.

Why wait?

If you're ready to respond, the Holy Spirit is ready to lend supernatural strength to your decision (see Philippians 2: 13). With a writing pad in hand, ask God to show you what old, unfinished business is stopping you from bearing fruit for Him. Write it all down. Then confess each sin to Him one at a time. Begin immediately to ask forgiveness of others, make restitution, or mend relationships as needed.

When we respond to God's conviction in a specific area, something extraordinary happens: Discipline ends *immediately*. Our Father, who has been watching and waiting for this moment, runs toward us with outstretched arms, His best robe in hand and a family celebration in mind. (Watch how the Father responded to a son's return in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15: 11-32.)

I promise you'll wonder what it was about that stinky old trash that was worth keeping you away from your Father's delight and a new start on life.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *"Lord, show me what sins are blocking me from bearing fruit for You. Help me to make things right "*

*When you have a right-standing relationship with God, you have a life of freedom, liberty, and delight;
you are in Gods will*

OSWALD CHAMBERS

Dag 13 op Woensdag 1 Augustus 2008**"YOU-TURN"**

*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation,
not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*

2 CORINTHIANS 7:10

Think of God's discipline as traffic signs along the road of your life. Some quietly caution. Some sternly direct. Some nearly shout alarm.

Yet every message of discipline, whether gentle or urgent, provides vital information. In spiritual terms, these messages are intended to lead us to repentance—a change of mind and direction, away from sin and toward God. For believers, it's the most important "you-turn" we'll ever take.

In Day 10 of this week, we talked about the different degrees of God's intervention. Today I want you to meet two outstanding Bible leaders who responded very differently to the road signs. Each was a man who had been fruitful for God and came to a "you-turn" in his life. In that moment, one chose to ignore the signs and paid a great price; the other turned and received a great victory.

LEADER ONE: A GOOD MAN SAYS NO TO GOD'S DISCIPLINE. King Asa, great-great-grandson of David, grew up to love God and serve Him despite being raised by parents who did not. Asa was a good king who initiated many reforms. In his later years, however, he started to trust his allies more than God. When a prophet confronted him, King Asa angrily threw the man in prison.

From that moment, Asa's benevolent rule turned sour, and he began to suffer severe health problems (see 2 Chronicles 16:10-13).

Don't miss the stages of Asa's slide toward disaster: He didn't listen to rebuke; then, instead of responding to God's chastening, he vented it on others (v. 10); finally, he even refused to repent under scourging. The Bible says, "His malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD" (v. 12). And Asa died in great agony.

What a tragic end to a once-promising life!

LEADER Two: A GOOD MAN SAYS YES TO GOD'S DISCIPLINE. King Josiah, a descendant of David, grew up to love and serve God despite being the son and grandson of kings who did not. He was a good king who initiated many reforms (starting to sound familiar?). While remodelling the temple his workers discovered "the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 22:8). Josiah immediately asked a scribe to read it to him.

Convicted by how far the nation had strayed from God's Word, the king wept, repented, and tore his robe. He called national leaders together to hear the Scriptures; then he made a public pledge to follow the Lord fully.

The result? Through a prophet, God told Josiah, "Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke ... I also have heard you" (2 Kings 22:19). It was the beginning of a major nationwide revival. In fact, Josiah's reign became a high point in Israel's history.

For Josiah, a quick response to the first sign of trouble ended God's intervention and invited enormous blessings.

Take a minute to evaluate what signs God might be putting in your path today. For a review of how to recognize the different degrees of discipline, refer back to Day 10.

If God is rebuking you, I urge you to listen to what you know is right and do it. You will lose more than you gain by waiting.

If you're in chastening, you have already resisted God too long and paid too great a price.

The stress and opposition you feel today are God's urgent call to you: "Get out of this sin before its consequences become even more severe."

If you're in scourging, let me ask you, How hard is your heart over this ongoing, serious sin? Have you gotten used to saying, "I'm just made this way," or "I think God has given up on me"? If so, watch out! Great trauma and regret may lie ahead. I beg you to turn around.

Repentance is a "you-turn" toward God's will. It's something only we can choose to do. And it's always the first move toward the abundant life for any of God's wayward daughters and sons.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *Can I recall a time when my sin brought me to tears? How did I feel after I repented? What could possibly be keeping me from repenting of sin right now?*

*I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins.
Return to Me, for I have redeemed you. "*

ISAIAH 44:22

Bear fruits worthy of repentance.

LUKE 3:8

Dag 14 op Donderdag 1 Augustus 2008**GOD'S SURPRISE MOVES**

When the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

JOHN 21:4-6

You've spent a week looking more deeply into the process of "lifting up" -the acts of God in our lives that are specifically intended to separate us from the sins that put blight on our relationships and our productivity. The very fact that you have had the courage to face this serious discussion each day says something important about you: You hunger after God, and you won't let your sins--even the ones you struggle with the most--keep you very long from seeking His best for your life.

It's important that you know that, because it's true. You have a promising future in your Father's vineyard. Peter shared this same determination to follow Jesus, even after he had failed Him badly

And he proved it with one bold leap.

You remember the scene from John 21:1-19. Peter and several other disciples had returned to fishing after the Crucifixion. It was early morning on the lake. Shorebirds piped in the reeds, boats bumped and creaked in the mist, and water dripped from the nets as the men worked. But there was no sign of fish.

Peter's nets were empty spiritually as well as physically. He was still "in Christ," but sin was preventing any kind of harvest. He had stopped fishing for men and returned to fishing for fish. In vineyard terms, his branch was blighted and barren. And we know why--only days before, he had caved in to fear and denied his Lord.

Pause today to consider how Jesus responded to Peter. You'd think such grievous sin would warrant more intense discipline. But after the men finally landed their nets full of fish, Jesus invited them to sit down for breakfast. And after breakfast, He offered Peter the gentlest of rebukes. Simply a question-"Do you love Me?" (*w. 15-17*).

To me, this scene is a poignant reminder of two of God's mercyfilled, surprise moves in our own lives. For example:

- *God does not discipline for every sin.* A parent acts when he sees a pattern developing or a wrong attitude taking root; he doesn't impose discipline on a child for every misbehaviour. In the same way, God is not poised over our lives, ready to strike at the first sign of sin.
- *God may not discipline us immediately after we sin, giving us time to repent on our own.* You might even pray, "Be merciful to me. Please give me time to repent."

These "mercy surprises" that God extends to us always have a wonderful purpose. The Bible says that God is "longsuffering toward us ... that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Commenting on Peter's restoration, the late Roy Hicks Jr. wrote in *A Small Book About God*: "What breaks your heart and mine is being forced to recognize that even though we have failed Him miserably, we genuinely do love Him. We have failed Him--only to discover that He doesn't want to talk about our failures. He wants to talk about our love."

How shocking it is to come out of a season of discipline knowing that God is more kind and giving than you ever dared hope and that you want to do His will more than you ever thought possible.

As we close this week together, take several minutes for a conversation with your Father.

Look back over your past rebellions. Apologize for hurtful choices. Thank Him for His steadfast kindness and unflinching commitment to your welfare. Tell Him you serve Him for His pleasure-and yours.

And look forward to more of God's surprises in pruning, your next season in His vineyard.

My VINEYARD JOURNAL: *Do I respond to sin by repenting or by running from Jesus? How might experiencing Gods mercy and letting it penetrate my heart change the way I respond when I've sinned?*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

PROVERBS 1:7