

Peaches, Pruning, and Spiritual Progress

BY ROBIN RUFF VAN WAGENEN

Like pruning away the unnecessary limbs from a tree, we need to prune away those activities that might weaken our testimonies or lead us astray.

I felt heartsick as I crested the hill toward our house and saw boards and tree branches scattered everywhere across the side of our yard. We had been gone only a couple of hours, yet that was long enough for one of the infamous east winds in our area to do its damage. It was really my fault though—I had been greedy!

When we moved to our new home, we were anxious to taste homegrown peaches and apricots again as we had in our previous home. Garden space in our yard is tight, but we uprooted three crabapple trees and planted three peach trees and two apricot trees—

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GREG NEWBOLD





HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

much too closely together. We waited anxiously for a couple of years for them to grow big enough to start bearing fruit.

This year was going to be our first bumper crop. The beautiful array of blossoms and warmer days boded well. In my mind I could already taste the cool juice of a sweet, fresh peach.

Earlier in the spring my husband, Bob, had asked if he should prune the trees. He said that it would be an advantage to both the trees and the fruit to be pruned. A couple of kindly neighbors even offered their

assistance if we needed any pruning help. But I said no to them all. I didn't want to give up any potential peach to pruning shears. I wanted plenty for canning and eating fresh.

As the branches grew bigger, Bob suggested we knock off some of the smaller peaches so the branches would have an easier time holding the fruit. Again I protested and persuaded him to leave them alone. Soon it was obvious the branches could not hold the bumper crop, so Bob put boards under the branches to hold up the sagging limbs. We crossed our fingers in hopes that we could harvest the fruit in time.

And then the winds came and did their devastating work in the space of just a few minutes. As I surveyed the damage, I found that several of the largest branches had been torn from the trunk and lay on the ground with greenish-orange peaches clinging to the broken limbs. The boards that had been propping the branches for several weeks were strewn across the yard like giant toothpicks.

It occurred to me that our own growth can be much like the growth of these trees. In order to be as healthy as possible and bear the best fruit they can, fruit trees have to be pruned by cutting out the unnecessary limbs. They have to be shaped and molded to withstand the wind and the weight of their own fruit. As I learned, not doing this can be disastrous.

The limbs of a tree are like all the possible actions we can accomplish in our lives. To gain a testimony and accomplish our eternal goals in this life, we have to prune away those

1. Draw a large picture of a tree with many branches. Have family members label the branches with activities in which the family participates. Read the story together. Discuss which family activities might weaken our testimonies or lead us astray. Use scissors to cut off the branches and discuss how pruning can make us stronger.

2. Share the story of Sister Van Wagenen. Have your family search the scriptures to see how many times pruning and trees are used. Ask how the idea of pruning is represented in the scriptures. Read paragraphs seven and eight, and discuss how they apply to you individually and as a family.

activities that might weaken our testimonies or lead us astray. Children, like these young trees, need parents' guidance and correction as they grow.

The challenge for parents is that when children are young we may tire of the constant need to gently correct them and help them keep on course. For whatever reason, we may hesitate to discipline them or we may not allow them to suffer the consequences of their actions when this is needed.

In Doctrine and Covenants 136:31, the Lord says, "My people must be

tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom."

I now wonder how the Lord is pruning me. Am I learning the lessons he wants me to learn? Am I bearing fruit worthy of Him? Do I see and appreciate the guidance of the Master's hand in my life? Do I let go of what is unnecessary or sinful in my life and keep only what is good?

Last spring I finally allowed Bob to prune our trees. I shed a tear as he lopped off many of the remaining branches. I bit my tongue later as he carefully went out and thinned some of the fruit off the tree. I didn't think there was enough wood left to even bear fruit. However, many peaches did start to grow on the few remaining limbs. They were not great in number, but they were the largest, sweetest peaches we have ever had.

As my children are leaving for missions and for school, I see how this analogy applies to their lives. Through gospel teachings in the home, examples of Church leaders, occasional "pruning" episodes, and learning through their own experiences, they have grown strong branches and are beginning to bear wonderful fruit, even in ways I never expected. How grateful I am for a loving Heavenly Father who prunes us and helps us tend our gardens, so we may literally see the "fruits" of our labors. ■

