



This article provided by Mark Dance, CEO of Care4Pastors, and David Ferguson with the Great Commandment Network.

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14).

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

"Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

A great connection exists between the sources of light and "pruning."

Not only do *encounters with Jesus* and *experiencing Scripture* transform or "prune" us, but so does "iron sharpening iron" *engagement in fellowship* with others. God's people are an additional source of God's light that when received in humility, can encourage our journey in Christ-likeness (see Matthew 5:14).

True fellowship, in which we genuinely love each other, enables the "full expression" of God's love in and through us. As we experience God's love through the love of others, we see Him as He really is. *"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another"* (Proverbs 27:17; see Hebrews 12:1–2; 10:25).

WHAT SHOULD I IMPROVE?

Although pruning is sometimes painful, it's not punitive. In John 15, we see that our Father's motive is to help us become more fruitful.

Pruning toward fruitfulness is a reward for those who remain consistently connected to Jesus.

I've been asking God to prune my life to become more fruitful, and here is what He's shown me so far.





Journaling

My journaling has been a joke for years. I always love the payoff, but consistency has eluded me. This spring, my desire to write my thoughts and prayers has been rekindled because journaling helps me to abide in Christ. I have no desire to turn back to mediocrity after this pandemic has passed. My goal is to develop a realistic reading plan before summer and stick to it through the end of the calendar year.

Reading

Although I read the Bible every day, I struggle with sticking to a singular Bible reading plan. The same is true for the stacks of books I want to read.

Friending

What I've missed the most this spring are my friends and church family. I hit the ground running in January, then spoke at five marriage conferences and two churches in February, so I'm not complaining about a break from preaching. However, this pandemic has paused our pursuit of finding a church family and friends in Oklahoma. The online experience does not replace life-on-life relationships that everyone needs.

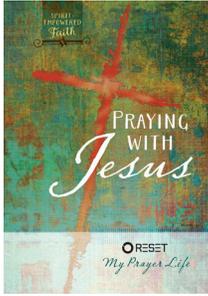
Spouse

"Cleave" means "to pursue hard." Janet and I haven't stopped dating since our first date, but I never want us to coast. Your ministry will never be stronger than your marriage, so when the COVID coast is clear again, pursue your spouse as you did before your wedding.

Kids

Our kids are adults and live in another state. Although we missed seeing them this spring, our lives weren't disrupted as much as those who've been sequestered with kids every day. I guess that you have made quite a few happy memories, but you probably need a break from each other. As you gradually resume your work routine away from home, be intentional about staying connected to your children. Consider this COVID reset as an opportunity to take your parenting to another level going forward. You can use this same pruning exercise to assess your ministry, but I'd suggest you go through it personally first. Self-assessments are only as helpful as we are willing to be honest with ourselves about ourselves. So, what needs to be pruned from your life right now?





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PRAYING WITH JESUS

Diligence in Priority of Marriage and Family

Marriage and family are to be a major focus for the pastor and church leader. To have a successful ministry, one must have a growing, vibrant relationship with one's spouse and family. No matter how popular a pastor may be with people or how effective the preaching, if he is not committed to a thriving marriage and family relationship, ministry will not endure. What is needed for a healthy, growing marriage? Scripture helps us know where to begin:

"Each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

LOVE Others in Community

Make time to express your humility and love. Ask this question of both your spouse and your family:

I want you to sense that you are the most important people in my life. I want to know how I can improve because I love you so much. In order for you to sense my priority, what would you enjoy more of or less of from me?

Excerpt from Praying with Jesus written by Mark Dance
and Michael Lewis

