Movements in the life of a disciple.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. John 15: 1, 2.

As we follow Jesus we experience times of pruning and growth. We are invited to remain in Jesus, and to know his love. As we do this, we will bear much fruit. Perhaps there are common themes to different movements of pruning and growth in our lives. These do not have to be linear; you may experience more than one at the same time. They may coincide with life events – leaving school, marriage or a new job, becoming a parent, a mid-life (or mid-youth) crisis, bereavement.

These movements that might feel like pruning or growth include

Awakening – becoming aware of God's presence or love.
This might look like:
The first experiences of becoming a Christian.
A growing sense of God's presence or activity.
A fresh sense of joy, presence, hope.
An awareness of a need only Jesus meets (shame, guilt, loneliness, fear).

The invitation might be – to begin a new journey as a follower of Jesus.

Contributing – playing your part in something bigger
This might look like:
Exploring discipleship and working out how everyday life interacts with faith.
Learning to share your story with others
Serving in church, or community
Discovering a spiritual or practical gift as you play your part.

The invitation might be – to let your life more fully be part of God's story.

Hungering – longing for a holy life
This might look like:
Becoming aware of a sin pattern and wanting to be free.
Yearning for greater adventure in life of faith.
Seeking for a deeper sense of intimacy with God.
Struggling to find deliverance from the slavery of comfort and control.

The invitation might be –to be free from idols, to be set apart for God.

Calling – following a Godly passion or purpose
This might look like:
Discerning gifts that feel a most natural fit.
Sensing a growing excitement or frustration.
Developing a vision for community, business, workplace or project.
Taking on greater responsibility in work, family, community or church.

The invitation might be – to discover the gift that only you can bring.

Contending – struggling for breakthrough in the ordinary or difficulty
This might look like:
Wrestling with faithfulness in the everyday.
Living with the gaps between ideal, hope, faith and reality.
Walking alongside others in severe difficulty.
Faithfully praying for healing or provision.

The invitation might be – to grow in strength by engaging in struggle.

Breaking – realising the box you have been using is too small
This might look like:
Finding that the faith that was passed on to you no longer fits.
Sensing an absence or silence in your prayers.
Developing negativity towards the people or institutions that passed faith to you.
Owning disappointment about, for example, unanswered prayer, relationship breakdown, unmet hopes.

The invitation might be – to let God be better and bigger than you had been led to believe.

Re-integrating – Being led deeper into community or relationships.
This might look like:
Re-engaging with community or friendship after separation.
Finding hope and beauty in the mess of normal relationships.
Discovering a new naivete or hopefulness.
Discerning a deeper purpose or gift to others.

The invitation might be – to be led by love, not self.

Discussion Questions:

Have you experienced many of these movements in your faith?
Where you identify pruning and fruit in them?
Can you spot ways in which bible characters experience something like them.

Can you see some movements that feel relevant to you right now?
What might cause you to get stuck here?
What is the gift here?
How do you remain in Jesus in this moment?

Resources that have helped me ferment this – most these authors are prolific podcasters.

Kate Coleman – Metamorph
Ronald Rollheiser – Sacred Fire, Domestic Monastery
Martin Shaw – Liturgies of the Wild
Tish Harrison – Liturgies of the Ordinary
Elizabeth Oldfield – Fully Alive.
David Brooks – The Second Mountain

