

The Olive Tree: Personal Inventory

Moving to the letter I in OLIVE, it is time to take INVENTORY.

Pruning is a highly judicious art. It protects the health of the tree by permitting greater circulation of air, for the olive tree is wind-pollinated. The cutting away of live branches may seem foolish, even wasteful, when assessing the tree's abundant productivity in past seasons. Yet this severe act will revitalize an aged tree, compensate for root loss, and promote desirable blossom formation for the coming season.

This example from nature of resolutely pressing toward your vision despite challenges was mirrored in Jesus' purposeful journey to the cross.

Now when the time was almost come for Jesus to be received up [to heaven], He steadfastly and determinedly set His face to go to Jerusalem.

Luke 9:51

Amplified Bible

Knowing that He would face certain death, Jesus, nonetheless, resolved to finish the path to Resurrection. Although His intermediate prospects pointed to pain and even death, He endured all for the joy set before Him. Like the olive tree, our live branches must be pruned to bear good fruit.

Inventory in the retail business is the most dreaded time of year. Every item must be accounted for. So, it is in life. This is where you have the opportunity to test your self-honesty. No matter how trivial it may seem, you must give an accounting of all your assets and liabilities. Do not dread this exercise; it will set you free! I promise!

Author, motivational speaker, and ultra long-distance runner, Stan Cottrell has run across many countries and has met the people of the world face to face: the man in the street to heads of state. After a life lived on an international scope, he made this keen observation of mankind: "Objectivity is a myth. Everything we judge is based on our developed perceptions and opinions." I concur.

When taking inventory, strive to be as objective as possible. When you have finished, you may choose to share your list with a trusted advisor who knows you well enough to assess your findings. This is not the time to share it on social media because once you put it on the Internet, it lives forever. You do not want your introspection to become a water-cooler conversation. Be serious enough about your life's goals and your chosen path to hold it close to your heart. Go to your Personal Discovery Journal to the Assets and Liabilities exercise. Set aside enough time to accurately and honestly take a personal inventory. Do this in the quiet of your home, office or personal retreat without the distraction of electronics, phones, or other

intrusions. Do not feel like you must complete this exercise in one sitting. Even if you only have a few minutes at a time, list one item. Dwell on it – even if only briefly. Resume the exercise when the next opportunity for solitude presents itself. Plan this time into your schedule as soon as possible.

Do not be alarmed if your list of liabilities is longer than your assets at first glance. Most people think they have a longer list of liabilities than assets. The point of this exercise is honest evaluation for the purpose of eliminating weaknesses and turning them into strengths. Realize that you need time and a plan to change. Some areas may take a year or even longer to alter.

The master pruner must know the individual needs of each tree in the grove. With the exactness of a sculptor's skillful hand, he prunes each specimen, taking into consideration the tree's age, health, limb support and penetration of sunlight.

Your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you even ask.

SACRIFICE NOW TO REAP A HARVEST IN DUE SEASON

Pruning is a highly judicious art. God promised Joseph that he would be a great leader and that his brothers would bow before him. As a youth, Joseph lacked maturity to keep that promise to himself resulting in the resentment of his siblings which led to him eventually being sold into slavery by them. Despite his circumstances, Joseph believed God.

As a servant to Potiphar, Joseph rose through the ranks to become a respected advisor until Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. When rejected, she accused him of taking liberties which resulted in his imprisonment. Yet, he still held fast to God's promise. During Joseph's imprisonment, he was called on to interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh when all the soothsayers had failed. Impressed with Joseph's gift, the Pharaoh restored him to a position of honor, eventually elevating him to the position of Pharaoh's second-in-command. Joseph's spiritual insight saved the Egyptians and indeed brought his starving brothers bowing before him, begging for help.

Joseph's trials built character. He grew from an immature dreamer into a wise ruler. Without the pruning he endured with great patience, he would never have been restored to his father's embrace nor realized God's plan for his life.

What is impossible with men is possible with God.

Luke 18:27

Amplified Bible

Pruning live and productive branches from the tree (your life) may be painful as it was for Joseph, but in the eyes of God, and in time, pruning will result in a greater harvest. Many years may pass until reaping a mature crop... your desired vision.

Perhaps a part of your life that has been very productive has been "pruned". It can be very upsetting and bewildering to see this part of your life end. Yet, many times this pruning results in even greater growth and a heavier yield in the future. Pruning cultivates better growth patterns; realize that a new direction may be necessary to achieve your long-term goals.

Cutting away liabilities permits greater circulation of air; that is, the pollination of your mind and heart can more easily occur, flooding you with positive ideas and altering your path.

Pruning dead wood (weaknesses) serves to strengthen other areas and values of your life. Pruning allows light to reach the innermost part of the tree. Likewise, spiritual pruning – allowing the Holy Spirit to remove the hindrances and non-productive things in your life – allows the Son of God to nourish the inner depths of our hearts.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

That which appears destitute in the fall will surely prosper for years to come through the master pruner's acts of vision.

The first time I met Anthony Clark was in a maximum-security prison in San Quentin, California. He was bench pressing 400 lbs. like it was a warm-up amidst hundreds of hardened criminals while I videotaped the event with 2000 convicts surrounding us; no guards, no guns, no kidding. His record, bench pressing 800 lbs. reverse grip, among other successes, gave him the title, The World's Strongest Man. He wore a T-shirt that day with the saying in very large print on the back, **NO PAIN... NO GAIN!** His life story is one of pain to gain. A skinny abused kid bought a Sears set of weights and turned a frightful start in life to one of extraordinary achievement.

It took time, pain, persistence, tenacity, blindness to his nay-Sayers and vision to accomplish his goals. In time he achieved success and great notoriety which he used for God's glory visiting prisons and speaking to young kids about hope and what it takes to weather the storm to accomplish God's plan for their lives. He became a

master at his craft and helped shape (prune) many young lives. His message of hope comes from the depth of pain most of us will never experience. He became a very close friend and his words still echo in my ear hear on his answering machine, **“NEVER GIVE UP”**. His life was cut short but his legacy lives on. As we read the words concerning the journey of transformation...

At this time, complete the Personal Discovery Exercise on the following pages. Add Personal Reflections before proceeding to the next chapter of *The Articles of Transformation*.

Personal Discovery Exercise Four
Assets/Strengths

Skills and abilities: Talent and knowledge

Character attributes: Mental and ethical traits

These unique traits will help you understand what God has in store for you. Some people discover His plan late in life. Keep the faith!

Liabilities/Weaknesses

Lack of desired skills and abilities (Talent and knowledge)

Lack of character attributes (Mental and ethical traits)

These traits will illuminate what you are not suited for. You're one step closer!

You are uniquely gifted by God!
Begin to discover God's gifts and Plan!

Be Amazing! Learn how from... the Ancient Olive Tree

is the first lesson in *The Articles of Transformation* series.

Accompanying videos at: www.articlesoftransformation.com/beamazing.



Available on Amazon or directly from Visible Light Ministries

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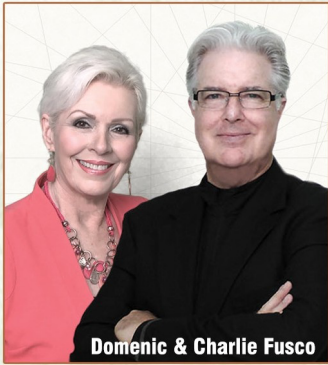
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As partners in marriage, business, and ministry, Domenic and Charlie Fusco have blended their artistry, media skills, and spiritual insights for five decades in support of myriad worldwide ministries and corporate enterprises. They are co-founders of Visible Light Ministries, Sanford, Florida, USA.

In addition to *The Articles of Transformation*, the Fuscos are co-authors of the inspirational website, www.greatnewsonline.com. Great News Online

offers uplifting commentary based on notable quotes for guiding its readers toward a path of thoughtful, productive living. It is Domenic and Charlie's hope to stir their online audience with aspirations that grow into what is most noble in character and human experience.

Most recently, the Fusco's have dedicated their expertise and passion to developing transformational materials and providing spiritual leadership for the upcoming generations. It is their desire and joy to share the gems of wisdom revealed in *The Articles of Transformation* with a global audience in support of the Gospel of grace.

***Become a shining light in the sea of social and spiritual mediocrity.
Dare to BE AMAZING to the glory of God!***

The Articles of Transformation

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