

## **GROWING IN FRUITFULNESS**

**John 15:1-17**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with the question, “What is the chief end of man?” Answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”
2. How do we glorify God?
3. We glorify God by producing fruit. **John 15:8** “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”
4. **Adrian Rogers** “God prefers fruits of the Spirit over religious nuts.”
5. What is fruit? **Bruce Wilkinson** “In practical terms, fruit represents good works -- a thought, attitude, or action of ours that God values because it glorifies Him.”
6. Wilkinson says there are two types of fruit:
  - i. Inner fruit: When you allow God to nurture in you a new, Christlike quality (see Gal 5:22-23).
  - ii. Outward fruit: When you allow God to work through you to bring Him glory, such as sharing your faith. Outward fruit appears when your motive is bring glory to God.
7. Rick Warren describes the four definitions of fruit in Scripture:
  - i. The fruit of repentance. Turning away from self-centeredness to God focused. Turning away from my control of my life to God’s control of my life.
  - ii. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). The fruit of character.
  - iii. The fruit of another Christian. When you bring somebody else to Christ.
  - iv. The fruit of ministry. Being involved in ministry – in serving others in the name of Christ.
8. Fruit can simply mean spiritual productivity. All of us want to be productive; we want our lives to count for something; we want to make a difference; we want to fulfill our potential; we want to do something that matters; we want to make a difference.
9. Christianity is not about being successful; it is about being fruitful.
10. But what do you do when you are not producing much fruit? In John 15, Jesus teaches us how to grow in fruitfulness.
11. Much of this sermon comes from one of my favorite books, *Secrets of the Vine*, by Bruce Wilkinson. I highly recommend it.

### **II. TEXT: John 15:1-17**

1. 1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me.

- 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.
2. 9 “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.
  3. 11 “I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.
  4. 12 “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master, is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.
  5. 17 “This is what I command you: Love one another.

### III. TEN JUICY TRUTHS ABOUT PRODUCING FRUIT

1. Not all Christians produce fruit.
  - i. This passage identifies four types of Christians:
    1. No fruit. v. 2
    2. Fruit. v. 2
    3. More fruit. v. 2
    4. Much fruit. v. 5
  - ii. **John 15:2** “Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.”
  - iii. **John 15:5** “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”
2. God is working on us to make us more fruitful. **John 15:2** “Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.”
3. It is how we glorify God. **John 15:8** “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”
4. It is how we prove to be a Christian. **John 15:8** “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”
5. It requires obedience. You cannot be a fruitful Christian without being an obedient Christian. **John 15:9-10** “9 As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain

- in my love. 10 If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."
6. It the path to joy. **John 15:11** "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."
  7. It is what we are called to do. It is a command. It is what we were saved to do. **John 15:16** "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit..."
  8. It is the only way to store up heavenly treasure. **John 15:16** "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain..."
  9. It is necessary for effective prayer. Fruitfulness involves prayer, and is required for prayer. **John 15:16** "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you."
  10. It involves loving one another. You must be a caring, committed member of the church. **John 15:17** "This is what I command you: Love one another."

#### IV. HOW GOD INCREASES OUR FRUITFULNESS

##### 1. Removing.

- i. **John 15:2** "Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes"
- ii. KJV translates "removes" as "takes away."
- iii. NIV = "cuts off"
- iv. These are unfortunate translations.
- v. You don't lose your salvation for failing to produce fruit. Your salvation is not based on your works, but on God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ who died for you (Eph 2:8-9).
- vi. The Greek for "removes" is *airo*. It means "take up" or "lift up."
  1. The disciples "took up" twelve baskets of food after feeding the five thousand (Mt 14:20).
  2. Simon was forced to "bear" Christ's cross (Mt 27:32).
  3. John called Jesus the Lamb who "takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29).
  - 4.
  5. **Bruce Wilkinson** "In fact, in both the Bible and in Greek literature, *airo* never means 'cut off....' Lifts up' suggests an image of a vinedresser leaning over to lift up a branch."
- vii. Why would a gardener "lift up" a branch? **Listen to the words of a grape farmer:** "New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground. But they don't bear fruit from there. When branches grow along the ground, the leaves get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless. The branch is much too valuable to cut it off and throw it away, so the gardener will] go

through the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches. He lifts them up and washes them off. Then he wraps them around the trellis or ties them up. Pretty soon they're thriving."

- viii. Removing has to do with the gardener removing branches from the ground and washing them off they can produce fruit.
- ix. What does this have to do with the Christian growing in fruitfulness?
- x. If you aren't producing fruit, it is because there is sin in your life. You are a branch lying low in the mud.
- xi. When a Christian is living in sin and not bearing fruit, God removes us from the ground. He lifts us up and washes us off.
- xii. How does God "remove" us from the mud? Loving discipline.
- xiii. **Hebrews 12:5 (KJV)** "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."
- xiv. Notice that Hebrews 12:5 identifies three degrees of discipline:
  - 1. Rebuking: A verbal warning. This can be a convicting thought; a prick of your conscience; a timely word from another person; a Scripture; a sermon; or conviction by the Holy Spirit. If you harden your heart and close your ears, God intensifies the discipline.
  - 2. Chastening: It is felt as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy no longer does. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finances. Feeling unfulfilled at church, critical of Christian friends, on the outs with God. The Bible feels like lead weight instead of welcome relief. Your relationship with God seems blighted by sadness or lethargy.
  - 3. Scourging: To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It means cause excruciating pain. "Every son" experiences this at some point. This is when you are living in open sin and ignoring God previous attempts to get your attention. This can be something like a serious illness.
- xv. **Steven Furtick** "God does not discipline us to pay us back but to bring us back."
- xvi. God disciplines us because He loves us. He wants to clean us off so that we can get back to producing fruit. If we ignore discipline, it intensifies. If we heed it, it ends.

## 2. Pruning.

- i. **John 15:2** "Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit."

- ii. This is for Christians that are producing fruit, but God wants you to produce more. To be more spiritually productive. More mature. More effective at ministry. Making a bigger impact. For this God moves to pruning.
- iii. To prune means to shrink, to reduce, to cut off.
- iv. Without pruning, a vine will fill up with leaves and branches but will produce fruit. It becomes so full that the sun can't reach into the areas where fruit should form. So every year the gardener has to remove a lot of wood.
- v. So, how does pruning work in the Christian life?
- vi. Pruning involves God cutting off the distractions and unnecessary business in your life. The activities and relationships that are distracting you and preventing you from producing more fruit.
- vii. **Bruce Wilkinson** "All those preoccupations and priorities in our lives that, while not wrong, are keeping us from more significant ministry for God."
- viii. Good is the enemy of best. You can fill up your time with good things, and they will prevent you from maximizing the best things.
- ix. Every opportunity is not an obligation.
- x. Every invitation is not a calling.
- xi. Busyness does not equal effectiveness.
- xii. Sometimes the way to achieve more is to do less.
- xiii. At times you will experience discomfort in your life. Maybe the feeling that you are very busy, but not really fulfilling your potential. Maybe you feel burned out. Too busy for church. Too busy for significant time with God. Too busy for significant ministry. Ask the Lord if He wants you to drop some of your responsibilities; to do some pruning.

### 3. Abiding.

- i. **John 15:5** "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me."
- ii. What happens when you are producing more fruit? I hope you aren't satisfied, because God wants you to produce much fruit.
- iii. The next step is called abiding (or remaining).
- iv. To produce much fruit, you must abide in Christ. To abide in Christ is to keep a constant, close connection with God. To deepen your relationship with Him. As you do, He produces much fruit through you.
- v. **John Piper** "Abiding in Jesus means staying vitally connected, hour by hour, to the one who alone produces in our lives everything he demands."
- vi. **Matt Chandler** "In a very real sense, the singular duty of the Christian is to abide and pursue a relationship with God; to center ourselves in his presence and in his power and let that transform us."
- vii. We can get so busy working for God that we don't have time to spend with God. If that is the case, our fruitfulness will flatline, and eventually decrease.
- viii. Christianity is not just about working for God; it is a relationship with God.

- ix. We tend to assume that the key to abundant fruit is to try harder, to do more, to get busier? But the key is to abide. To get closer. To stay closer. You abide, and He will produce the fruit. Stay close, and fruit happens.
- x. How do you abide in Christ?
- xi. Spend daily time with Christ in the word and in prayer. This is called a daily quiet time.
- xii. I recommend using a Bible-reading plan. You can find several options on the church's website.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

1. God created you to produce fruit. He wants you to produce fruit. And He is presently working on you to increase your fruitfulness. Will you cooperate with Him, or resist Him? Will you work with Him or resist Him? Wouldn't it be great to make 2022 your most fruitful year ever?
2. Scientists were digging in some Indian ruins, and found an old necklace on a corpse. On the necklace was a seed – 600 years old at least. They planted it, and it grew!
3. It is never too late to become a fruitful Christian! No matter how old you are, or how much you have strayed, or how far you have fallen, you can be a productive Christian.