



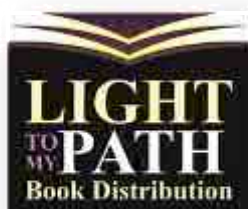
F. Wayne MacLeod

Much Fruit

**A Study of the Teaching of
Jesus about the Vine and
the Branches in John 15:1-8**

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About the Vine and the Branches in John 15:1-8*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

Light To My Path Book Distribution
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Much Fruit

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Preface

It may be that John 15 is one of the passages commented on more than any other section in the Bible. I do not pretend to have anything new to say on these verses that has not already been said somewhere else. I write this study because the Lord has placed a burden on my heart for the church.

The first part of that burden relates to the state of the church in our day. I have seen all too many believers become content with where they are in their spiritual lives. In reading John 15:1-8, however, I am struck by the words “fruit,” “more fruit,” and “much fruit.” In these words, the Lord Jesus expresses the desire of the Heavenly Vinedresser that we become even more productive. It is my firm belief that the Lord God wants to do so much more. The only hindrance is the willingness of His people.

The second part of the burden I feel relates to the source of our strength and wisdom for the task. The imagery of a vine and its branches is such a powerful image. It rebukes our self-reliance and reminds us of the foolishness of relying on our own wisdom and strength. At the same time, however, it shows us that, connected to the Vine as the source of all power and authority, there is no limit to what God can do through us.

I trust that the Lord will enable us to see afresh, the heart of God for us as branches in Christ, the Vine. I pray that the Lord will give us greater passion and boldness through this study

to be the instruments He would have us to be in this world that so desperately needs a Saviour.

God bless,

F. Wayne MacLeod

Chapter 1 - Introduction

*1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.
(John 15:1)*

As we begin our meditation on John 15:1-8, the scene is set for us in verse 1. Jesus compares Himself to a vine and His Father to a vinedresser. Let's take a moment to consider what Jesus is communicating through this comparison.

The True Vine

Jesus identifies Himself as the true vine. As we consider how Jesus describes Himself here, let's first hear the words of the Father in Isaiah 5 about His people Israel:

1 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes... 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry! (Isaiah 5)

The illustration of the vine did not begin with Jesus. Even before the Lord Jesus came to this earth, the Father used this

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illustration to speak of His people Israel— "the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel" (Isaiah 5:7). Notice, however, in the parable of Isaiah 5, what the Lord had to say about the vines of Israel. Although God situated them on a fertile hill, cleared the stones and planted the choicest vines, they only produced "wild grapes." These grapes were bitter and unsuitable for making wine.

Isaiah was not the only prophet to compare Israel to a vine. Listen to the words of Jeremiah:

*21 Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?
(Jeremiah 2)*

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah speaks about how God planted Israel as a choice vine, but she "turned degenerate and became a wild vine."

Ezekiel takes this picture of the degenerate and wild vine further when he proclaimed:

1 And the word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? 3 Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? 4 Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? (Ezekiel 15)

The choice vine of the Lord had become useless. The whole purpose of the vine was to produce fruit, but it did not do that. Its wood could not make a peg to hang a pot on. It did not even have any value as firewood. It was worthless.

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It is in this context that we can best see what Jesus is saying in John 15:1. Israel, the vine of God, had become wild and useless. The Lord Jesus humbled Himself to take on this role of the vine. He took on the same form as His people and lived among them.

Notice, however, that Jesus describes Himself as the "true" vine. The word true is the Greek word ἀληθινός (*alēthinós*). It refers to something that cannot lie and is genuine, sincere and upright. In other words, while Israel yielded wild grapes, Jesus produced the genuine fruit of righteousness. He was everything God intended Israel to be and more. He became an example of what the true vine should be.

The Vinedresser

The Lord Jesus goes on to say that His Father was the vinedresser. The word used in this verse is the Greek word γεωργός (*geōrgós*). It comes from two other Greek words, "ge" and "ergon." The word "ge" is translated by ground, earth or land. The word "ergon" means to work. By putting the two words together, we have someone who works the land or, in this case, one who cares for the vine. We need to make several important points about this role the Father has taken on as a vinedresser.

As the true vine, the Lord Jesus submitted to the Father as the vinedresser. Although He was equal to the Father, the Lord Jesus surrendered to His care and direction. His Father orchestrated the events and circumstances of Jesus' life, discipline and trained Him in the way He was to walk. The

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Lord Jesus walked in the leading of the Father and committed Himself to obey His will.

As the vinedresser, the Father cares for the vine to bring out the very best in it. This care implies pruning or cutting off anything that would hinder growth. It means training the branches of the vine in how they grow. The Heavenly Vinedresser is committed to the vine and wants to see it prosper.

Vinedressers want to see their vine produce fruit and spare no effort or expense to make this a reality. The purpose of the vine is to grow grapes. Apart from this fruit, the vine has no useful purpose.

Let me conclude with some observations about what we have seen so far. Notice that God called Israel to be a vine, but she failed to produce the grapes required. Israel produced wild, sour and unusable grapes. This is a picture not only of Israel but of human nature as well. Our deeds are tainted with the sourness of sin. That sourness permeates everything we do or say. The grapes we produce may look like regular grapes, but sin's bitterness is evident when we taste them. There is nothing we can do about this – this is our nature.

While Israel failed (as we all have), the Father sent His Son to take on that role for us. He did what we could never do – He lived a perfect life and became a true vine. He produced the fruit we could never produce— fruit that was pleasing to the Father. His life demonstrated perfectly what the Father intended for us.

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The role of the vine has been taken from us and given to Jesus. He alone can produce the fruit required by the Father. We are branches grafted on to the True Vine. It is His strength that flows through us. With Jesus, as the true vine, we can now produce fruit that is pleasing to the heavenly Vinedresser. Our usefulness depends on our connection to Jesus.

With Jesus as the vine and the Father as the vinedresser, we are without excuse. The fullness of Christ is in us, and the protective and nurturing care of the Father surrounds us. Connected to the true vine, we can now produce fruit that is pleasing to the Father.

For Prayer:

Father, we see ourselves in the people of Israel. Though they were vines, they could only produce the bitter grapes of sinfulness. We confess that the bitterness of sin permeates everything we do. We acknowledge that we cannot yield the sweet and pleasing fruit of righteousness because of our sinful nature.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you came to do what we could not do. You became the true vine. You perfectly satisfied the Father and brought forth fruit pleasing to Him. Thank you also, Father, that while we are no longer vines, we can be grafted into the true vine and participate with Him in fruit production that pleases the Father. Teach us how to abide in Christ so we can produce righteous fruit.

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Father, thank you that you have chosen to take on the role of vinedresser. Thank you that You care for us and want to see us be fruitful in our lives and ministry. Teach us to submit to you and your care so that our lives produce sweet grapes pleasing to you.

Chapter 2 - No Fruit

2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away... 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. (John 15)

In the last chapter, we saw that the Lord Jesus described Himself as the True Vine. Verse 2 speaks now about the branches of the Vine. The context indicates that we are the branches. Attached to the True Vine, and drawing from His resources, we can now produce fruit pleasing to the Father. Our production of good fruit is only possible because of our connection to Jesus, the True Vine. The fruit we bear is the fruit of Christ in us.

Verse two does not go into detail about the connection between the Vine and the branches. The focus of the verse is on producing fruit. Jesus tells us that if a branch does not bear fruit, the Vinedresser takes it away. Verse 6 goes into more detail about this "taking away" when it says:

6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. (John 15)

John 15:5 explains that the one who abides in Christ will bear fruit. Verse 6 tells us then that whoever does not abide in Christ and bear fruit will be cut off and burned. To understand this more fully, let's consider what happened to Israel, the

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vine of God, when she did not produce fruit worthy of her calling:

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry! (Isaiah 5)

Because Israel, the Vine of God, did not produce fruit worthy of her calling, the Lord chose to remove His protection so that she was devoured. She would be trampled down with no one to care for her. The blessing of the Lord, in the form of rain, would be taken from her, and thorns would grow up around her choking her out.

For a time, God removed His blessings from Israel. When He did, the enemy swept down and took her from her land. She lived in exile for forty years before God restored her blessing, and she was permitted to return to her land. She experienced this fire of God's wrath and judgement because she did not produce fruit worthy of her calling.

Writing to the Corinthian, the apostle Paul said:

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will

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become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3)

The church of Corinth was a struggling church with many problems and divisions. Paul reminded them that the Lord would one day judge the quality of their service. Each person's work would be revealed by fire. That fire would test the "sort of work each one had done" (verse 13). The individual whose works did not survive the fire of God's judgement would "be saved, but only as through fire" (verse 15).

In 1 Corinthians 5, we have an example of an individual in the church of Corinth who was not producing the fruit of salvation. Listen to the words of Paul about this individual:

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5)

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Here in the church of Corinth was a man who was having an illegitimate sexual relationship with His father's wife. According to Paul, the church needed to address this speedily. This individual was to be removed from the church's fellowship and delivered over to Satan so that his spirit might be saved. He was not to poison the church with his ungodliness.

We need to understand that those who are part of the Vine need to produce fruit worthy of the Vine. The Vinedresser removes every branch on the Vine not producing godly fruit. There are some important reasons for the removal of these branches.

First, the church's testimony is impacted by those who do not produce godly fruit. The church of our day is often accused of hypocrisy. This is primarily because of those who do not live the life God expects them to live. I have known people to turn their backs on God because of the bad fruit they have seen in His people's lives.

Second, a branch that does not produce godly fruit will impact the other branches on the Vine. When one part of the body is not working as it should, the whole body is affected. A branch that does not produce fruit still consumes the vine's energy and leaves less for the other branches. For this reason, when branches on a vine are not productive, the vinedresser will cut them off. With unproductive branches cut off, the sap then flows to the fruitful branches, allowing them to grow and become even more productive.

Everything has been done for each branch to produce the fullest crop. The strength of the vine is poured out into the branches. The vinedresser cares for the vine and the

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branches of that Vine. With the Spirit of Christ's power and the tender care of the Father, every branch can grow and reach its fullest potential if it draws from Christ and surrenders to the Father's work.

Notice in verse 2 that there are no exceptions to this principle of removing unproductive branches on the Vine.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away

Notice that the Lord tells us that He will take away "every branch" that is not bearing fruit. He expects that each branch connected to Him will bear fruit. Bearing fruit is not an option. Either you bear fruit or you are cut off. The consequences of not bearing fruit are so severe that no branch that is not doing what it was intended to do can remain on the Vine. It must be removed so that the other branches are not impacted.

The work of the kingdom of God depends on bearing fruit. God's kingdom is advanced through the gifts He has given the church. When those gifts are not used, the kingdom of God will suffer. A healthy vine is a vine that produces fruit. A healthy body is a productive body. The whole purpose of the vine is to produce the best grapes possible. The Vinedresser cares for the Vine to this end. The branches on the vine serve no other purpose but to bear the fruit the vine wants to produce. The goal of the vinedresser is to bring out the very best fruit.

Bearing good fruit is not an option for the believer. John 15:2, 6 makes this very clear. "Every branch" that does not bear fruit is cut off from the blessing of the Lord. Every work is tested by fire, and those who do not survive the fire of God's judgement will suffer loss. The good of the whole depends on the productivity of the individual parts. Those branches of the

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Vine that do not produce good fruit will either be removed or replaced.

Listen to the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 25. The context of these words is the parable of the talents. He speaks here about the servant who had not invested his talent to make a profit:

26 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'
(Matthew 25)

The parable shows us that the Lord God is looking for interest in His investment in our lives. Notice how the Master rebuked the servant who did not invest his talent and make a profit. The master was so angry with this servant that he took it away from him and gave it to another servant who would use it properly. This servant was thrown into outer darkness as a result of refusal to use his talent.

John 15:2 is quite alarming. It tells us that God is expecting fruit from His investment in our lives. It tells us that if we are connected to Christ, the true Vine, we must produce fruit. If you see no evidence of fruit in your life, you need to ask the Lord God about this. If you were withering away physically

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and sick all the time, would you not seek the advice of a doctor? Why would we not cry out to the Lord God when we find ourselves withering and unproductive in our spiritual lives?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 12 that a tree is known by its fruit:

*33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.
(Matthew 12)*

If you see bananas growing on a tree, you can be sure it is not an apple tree. You can tell a tree by the fruit it bears. If you are not producing good grapes, then there is one of two reasons for this. The first is that the connection between you and the Vine is severed. The second is that you are not part of the Vine but belong to some other type of tree. In either case, you need to do some serious investigation to find the solution.

We dare not excuse our lack of fruit. It is not the will of God that we are unproductive. John 15:2 tells us that any fruitless branch will be removed and burned. The heavenly Vinedresser intends that every branch produce an abundance of crops. If that is not happening in your life, you need to confess this to God and cry out to Him to heal you. A lack of spiritual fruit is not normal, nor is it excusable. It is a serious condition that must be quickly addressed before it is too late.

For Prayer

Father God, you tell us that all those who are connected to the True Vine will bear fruit. This is the natural result of being

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in a relationship with the Vine. You also tell us that those branches that do not bear fruit will be removed from the Vine and thrown away. Father, we thank you for the assurance of our salvation, but we cry out for a deeper connection with you. We long to know your power and blessing in our lives. We want to be instruments of your life. We want to please you by the fruit we bear. Help us to see unproductivity as a sickness. Teach us to take this seriously. Forgive us for times when we have been content not to bear fruit. Forgive us for the times when we produced fruit of inferior quality. Teach us to be productive branches. May the quality of fruit we yield bring great honour to your name and blessing to your kingdom.

Chapter 3 - Fruit

2 every branch in me that does bear fruit

We have seen the seriousness of not bearing fruit. The question we must now address is this: What does the fruit Jesus speaks about in this passage look like?. We can understand what Jesus is saying when it comes to a branch on a vine, but how does this illustration apply to believers in Jesus who live in flesh and bones?

The word Jesus uses here for fruit is the Greek word καρπός (karpós). It refers to plants, trees or crops that have been planted in the soil. There are several uses of the word καρπός in the gospels. Consider first the parable of Jesus in Luke 12:

16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'"
(Luke 12)

The rich man of this parable was looking for a place to store his crops. The word crops is the same word used by Jesus in John 15. In this case, the fruit was the abundance of the rich man's harvest.

In Luke 13, Jesus told another parable about a man who planted a vineyard and came looking for fruit but found none:

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6 And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' 8 And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (Luke 13)

In these cases, the word καρπός refers to the produce of the land.

Luke 1:42 expands the definition of καρπός when it speaks about the fruit of Mary's womb:

41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1)

Jesus was considered in this verse to be the fruit of Mary's womb. The word καρπός then does not just refer to crops of the field or the product of a tree or vine but also to children who grow in the womb of their mothers.

We discover more importantly, however, that the New Testament also uses the word καρπός to speak of the deeds and actions of individuals. Speaking to the Pharisees, John the Baptist said:

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of

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*vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8
Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matthew 3)*

The Pharisees of the day were religious people. On the outside, they seemed to do all the right things, but John understood that they were no different from the people around them. They were a proud people who lived as hypocrites, deceiving those who respected them. The word 'fruit' is used in this context to speak of the inner attitudes of the heart.

In Galatians 5:22-23, the apostle Paul writes:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5)

The apostle describes the fruit of the Spirit in these verses. This fruit is the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life, transforming them into the image of Jesus Christ.

Fruit in the New Testament is also the result of our labours. Consider what Jesus said in John 4:

34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. 36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. (John 4)

The apostle Paul uses the word καρπός in a similar way in Romans 1:13 when he said:

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13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. (Romans 1)

In John 4, Jesus spoke about His work and the harvest that was to come from His effort. In Romans 1, Paul wanted to visit the Romans to harvest some fruit for his labours among them. Fruit, in this sense, is the product of diligent and faithful service for the Lord. Lives are transformed, people are given hope, sin is broken. This is the fruit of our labours for Christ.

Consider also the words of Hebrews 13:

15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. (Hebrews 13)

Hebrews 13 speaks about the fruit of our lips. The author describes this fruit as the sacrifice of praise to God and lips that acknowledge the name of God. Our lips produce the fruit of praise and acknowledgement of God.

What do we learn from this brief study of the word καρπός? What does it teach us about the kind of fruit Jesus expects a branch on the vine to bear? We can break down what we have discussed into two categories.

Our Character

The word καρπός refers to who we are as individuals. John told the Pharisees who were outwardly righteous that they needed to produce fruit worthy of repentance. In other words, while they did the right things in front of others, they were not

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right with God in their heart. Their attitudes were ungodly and did not honour the God they claimed to serve. God was looking for the fruit of a right spirit and attitude toward Him. If we are going to bear good fruit, we must submit our attitudes to the microscope of God's Word. We must allow the Spirit of God to convict us and challenge our motives and intentions. Have you ever bitten into a piece of fruit that looked wonderful on the outside only to find that it was rotting from the core outward? The inner attitude of the heart is as important as what we demonstrate on the outside to others. Christ is looking for the fruit of a godly and sincere attitude from the heart.

Beyond this, however, Paul uses the word καρπός to speak of the fruit of the Spirit of God. The fruit of the Spirit relates to the inner work of God's Spirit in the believer. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the fruits the Spirit of God wants to produce in us. He wants to transform the anger in our hearts into gentleness and self-control. He wants to uproot the bitterness and plant His love and kindness instead. God is looking for the fruit of a godly character that His Spirit is producing in us.

The apostle James tells us that the most challenging thing to control is the human tongue. God wants to work in us in such a way that the fruit our lips bring praise to His name. The tongue is a reflection of the heart. God is looking for a transformed heart that expresses itself in the godly fruit of praise and thanksgiving from our lips.

The Result of our Labour

Not only does God expect that we demonstrate the fruit of godly character, but He also requires that we tap into the resources He has given us to minister to others. Paul wanted to see the Romans to reap a harvest among them. In other words, he wanted to see fruit for his labours in their midst.

The farmer who plants a crop in the spring expects to see a harvest in the fall. The Lord, who endowed us with spiritual gifts, anticipates that those gifts encourage and bless His people. He desires that those gifted by His Spirit with the calling to be evangelists use their gift in the hope of seeing men and women come to faith in Christ. He trusts that those gifted with pastoral and teaching gifts exercise those gifts to strengthen the body of Christ.

In the parable of the talents recorded in Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus spoke of a master who wanted to receive his money back from his servants with interest. He rebuked the man who buried his talent. We will all have to answer to God for how we have used the gifts he has given us. We will be accountable to God for the use of our time and resources. As servants, God expects us to be useful workers in His kingdom. As soldiers, He expects us to push back the forces of evil in our society. As investors in His kingdom, He expects that we will return His resources with interest.

While we cannot guarantee results, God calls us to be faithful in using our time and resources. We cannot harvest what we have not planted. So we must plant faithfully. We must also remember that the fruit God expects from us is also a fruit of godly character. If we are to produce this godly character, we must live in submission to the Spirit of God and allow Him to

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transform our attitudes and thoughts so that they reflect the purpose of God in our lives.

For Prayer:

Lord God, John 15:2 speaks about us as branches bearing fruit. We have seen that this is a requirement for every believer. Attached to the vine, we are transformed in character. The attitudes of our hearts are challenged and changed. As your Spirit works in us, we experience new life and purpose. The fruit of godly attitudes, character and words is perfected in us day by day. Teach us to be surrendered more fully to this inner work of your Spirit so that we can be the people you want us to be, bearing the fruit of righteous character.

We also realize that you have also called us to be lights in this world. As you mature our character, we ask that you send us out boldly to do your work. Teach us how to use our spiritual gifts. Give us the grace to share what you have given us with those around us for their encouragement, strengthening and salvation. We pray that what you have invested in us will be returned to you multiplied a hundred times. May the fruit of our service, in the power of your Spirit, bring you great pleasure and delight. May your investment in us not be in vain.

Chapter 4 - More Fruit

2 ...and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (John 15)

While it is quite clear from John 15:1,2 that the Lord Jesus expects every branch of the vine to bear fruit, this is not enough. He goes on in verse two to tell us that every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, so it produces more fruit.

There is no room for complacency. The fruit we bear is the fruit of a Christ-like character and the blessing of His Spirit on our service. Will we be content to be just a little like Christ? Will we be satisfied to know only a small part of His blessing on our service?

The words "more fruit" are the words of the Lord Jesus. The Saviour is not content to see us only partially like Him in character. He wants us to be transformed entirely into His image. It is not the purpose of the Lord that we experience a fraction of His enabling in service. He wants us to be thoroughly equipped for all good works. He wants our light to shine brightly so that all can find their way to Him. Wherever you are in your spiritual growth today, the Lord is calling for more. However much you feel the Lord has enabled you in service, there is still more. Until our dying day, there will be more fruit for us to bear for our God.

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I have met believers who have reached a certain point in their Christian life and become content to remain there. The character of Christ, however, is not wholly formed in them. There are still areas of their life that need the work of God's Spirit. These believers, however, have reached a point in their lives where they are content. They have no particular desire for the Lord to change them anymore. They have become happy where they are.

What is true of the character of these believers is also true in their service for the King. They have fallen into a routine and are not ready to be stretched further. They are unwilling to venture out into new territory.

The work God wants to do in us will not be complete until we are in His presence in heaven. As long as we have life and breath on this earth, God will be working on us and through us, perfecting and making us more fruitful. It is the heart of the true believer to continue growing in Christ. It is the desire of every godly person to be more useful for their Saviour. Wherever you are today, God has more for you. You who are producing the fruit of righteousness and faithful service, be aware that the Vinedresser desires more fruit. The words of John 15:2 speak to those who have been bearing fruit – "and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit. (John 15)

Notice the method used by the heavenly Vinedresser to produce more fruit on the branch. Verse 2 tells us that He prunes the branches producing fruit so that they produce more fruit. The word translated "prune" is the word καθαίρω (*kathairō*). It refers to something that is made pure or clean by the removal of filth. Verse 3 gives this sense when Jesus says:

More Fruit

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

While the word "clean" is a different Greek word from "pruned," nonetheless, Jesus connects the idea. To be pruned is to be cleaned. What happens when a vinedresser prunes the vine? He or she removes any dead or unproductive branches. They also remove branches that are growing in the wrong direction or block the sun from shining on other branches. This pruning allows the sap of the vine to have its maximum impact and ensure the vine's fruitfulness.

If you want to be more fruitful, be prepared for a good pruning. You cannot bear more fruit until the hindrances have been removed. All this means that the Lord will cut off the dead branches of pride and sinful attitudes. Some branches harm others by blocking the sun. God will deal with our relationships. While pruning is not a pleasant experience, it is necessary if we want to produce more fruit.

John 15:2 tells us that God will prune "every" branch that bears fruit. There are no exceptions here. God is in the process of removing every hindrance to productivity. This is what any good vinedresser would do. A vinedresser wants the vine to produce the best quality and the utmost quantity of fruit. To do this, he or she will sometimes have to be radical in pruning.

The word "every" is significant. It implies that nothing that hinders growth can remain if the branch is to be fruitful. How easy it is for us to excuse certain sins. The word "every" implies that no matter how small that hindrance may be, it must be addressed for the vine to reach its full potential.

Much Fruit

How does this pruning take place? John 15:3 answers this for us:

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (John 15)

Jesus told His disciples that they were clean because of the word He had spoken to them. To prune is to clean up the branch by removing hindrances to growth. Jesus told His disciples that they would be cleaned through the Word He spoke to them.

The only record we have of the word Jesus spoke is in the pages of the Scriptures themselves. The Old and New Testaments both proclaim the Messiah and His work. Scripture teaches us of the purpose of God for our salvation and growth in maturity. The apostle Paul declared:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3)

In these two verses, the apostle told Timothy that God inspired Scripture and intended it for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. By applying these Scriptures to their lives, the believer would be complete and equipped for every work the Father had for him or her. The Old and New Testament Scriptures teach us the truth about God and His plan for our lives. They convict and reproof us when we are wandering from the path of righteousness. They correct our course and get us back on track. By following and obeying these Scriptures, Paul tells us that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In other words, we will bear the fruit God intended us to produce.

More Fruit

The apostle told the Ephesians that God's Word was the Spirit's sword (Ephesians 6:17). The writer to the Hebrews says this about the Scriptures:

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4)

What is the tool the heavenly Vinedresser uses to prune the branches of the vine? It is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Employing the Word, God penetrates deeply into our lives. That Word exposes the hidden thoughts and intentions of the heart. It reveals what we cannot see. It shows us our wrong attitudes and habits. It shines a light on secret sins. If we let it, the Word of God will expose any hindrance to our spiritual growth and fruitfulness. It reveals the person of Christ to us, and like a mirror, it shows us who we are in comparison. The Word of God will not only expose our failures and shortfalls, but it will also instruct us in the path God has for us. As we submit to it, it will prune away every hindrance and entanglement that keeps us from becoming more like Christ and reaching our potential in Him.

It is the heart of the Vinedresser that each branch on the vine produces more fruit. For this to occur, He withdraws the sword of the Spirit and swings it against every hindrance and obstacle. This is often frightening for the believer. The process is necessary, however, if we are to bear more fruit. The Vinedresser does not swing that sword to harm us. He uses it with the skill of a great surgeon removing cancerous tumours. He intends it for our good and the glory of His name.

Much Fruit

If we want to produce more fruit, we must be students of the Word of God. We must not only study it but allow it to correct and train us in the path of righteousness. We must embrace the Spirit's conviction through that Word, as He exposes hidden sins and incorrect attitudes. We must submit to the leading and instruction of that word even if it means we must sacrifice our earthly treasures to walk in obedience. As we allow the Scriptures to shape and transform us, we will soon find that we will be bearing more fruit. The fruit will be evident in our character and God's blessing on our service. Branches that are already producing fruit will be pruned by the sword of the Spirit so that they can be even more fruitful.

Don't be content to remain where you are. Let the Word of God and the Spirit of Truth transform you and make you even more fruitful for the glory of the Saviour.

For Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as the Vinedresser, you have a profound desire that we produce more fruit. Please forgive us for becoming complacent and content with where we are when you are calling us to more. Thank you that the tool you use to prune away hindrances and obstacles is the Word of God. Teach us how to read that Word and allow it to change us. We pray that you would give us the grace to submit to its teaching. Use it to cut away entanglements in our lives. May we experience more fully its conviction as the Spirit exposes our shortcomings through it. May we not be just hearers of your Word but doers also. We surrender now to the work of the sword of your Spirit, knowing that when it has

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accomplished its purpose in us, we will be equipped for every good work and produce more fruit for your glory and honour.

Chapter 5 - Bearing Fruit

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

We have seen that the heart of the Father, as the heavenly Vinedresser is that each branch on the vine produces more fruit. With this goal in mind, He prunes the branches to yield an even greater abundance.

While pruning is essential for a vine to produce the best crop, Jesus brings up another vital principle in verse 4. Here, He reminds us that we cannot bear fruit unless we abide in Him.

The word "abide" in the Greek language has several meanings. The first is to remain in place. From the perspective of the vine, this is quite obvious. A branch disconnected from the vine cannot produce fruit. The life of the branch is not in itself but in the vine. It depends entirely on the sap of the vine to nourish itself and maintain health. Cut off the branch, and it will wither away and die.

The same principle is true from a spiritual point of view. If you and I do not remain connected to Christ, we cannot produce fruit worthy of His name. Before we came to know the Lord Jesus, we were dead in our sins. Disconnected from the Vine, we did not understand His purpose. Consider the words of Jesus in John 14:

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6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14)

Notice that Jesus tells us in this verse that He is the life. While it is true that we owe our physical life to Him, we also owe all spiritual life to Him as well. Without the presence of Jesus, our hearts are spiritually dead, our spiritual eyes are blind, and our spiritual ears are deaf to His voice. He is the life of God in us. Disconnected from Him, we have no spiritual life. We can produce wild grapes but not the fruit of the Spirit. The kind of fruit that God requires is the fruit that results from a connection with the Lord Jesus.

The word, abide also has another more personal meaning. The Greek word carries with it the idea of remaining united with someone in heart, mind and will. We have all met individuals who have professed faith in Jesus Christ but have wandered from that faith. It is quite possible to go through the motions but not be connected in mind, heart and will.

To abide in Christ requires the connection of my heart to Him. He is the devotion of my heart and my greatest desire and passion in life. Distractions may seek the heart's attention, but those who remain in Christ brush them off and keep their eyes on Christ, their love and desire.

To abide in Christ also means to remain connected to Him in mind. Listen to the exhortation of the apostle James:

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4)

Bearing Fruit

The apostle urged believers to cast off double-mindedness. The double-minded person is one who has not determined which path to follow. He or she has one foot in the world and another in Jesus Christ. Double-mindedness is something the heavenly Vinedresser must prune away. If you are going to remain in Christ, you must make up your mind. You must be committed to Him and determine to make Him your priority and focus in life. The rottenness of indecision will affect the quality of the fruit you produce. You cannot be only half connected to the vine and expect to yield the best fruit. To bear the fruit Christ requires, we must be committed to Him alone. We must make up our mind that He is the one we will follow and remain true to that commitment.

Abiding in Christ requires an act of the will. It is no good to say that you love the Lord with all your heart and not act on this. We must, as an act of the will, step out in the faith we profess. We must persevere in the faith the Lord has given to us. This will cost us something. To abide in Christ is not just an attitude but also an active commitment. Jesus tells us that if we are going to produce fruit, we will need to abide in Him. We must guard our hearts, minds and actions so that they are faithful to Him.

There is a deep connection between our passions and the actions we take. Jesus rebuked Israel because she did not produce good fruit. He did not mean that there was no fruit in their lives but rather that the fruit she bore was wild fruit that was of no benefit to the Vinedresser. If the passions of your heart are for things of this world, then you will generate fruit that carries that aroma. If your mind determines to make a name for yourself, then the rottenness of this determination will be evident in the fruit you bear. If you want to bear good fruit, your heart must remain loyal to Christ. If you want to

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please the Master by yielding a good crop of righteousness, then you will need to guard the attitude and desires of your mind, keeping them true to Him and His purpose. Only then can we produce a crop that bears witness to our relationship with the vine.

How can we keep our hearts, minds and wills in constant communion with Christ so that we bear fruit with the aroma of Christ? The answer lies in the next phrase of John 15:4 – "and I in you."

These words tell us that abiding is not only on our part. Christ also chooses to abide in us. In other words, He will remain in us and never leave us. He will be our constant strength and wisdom. He puts His Holy Spirit in the life of every believer, enabling them to walk and continue in fellowship with Him. He commits Himself to be faithful to us and expects the same thing from us. He devotes His resources to keep our heart, mind and will in tune with Him and His purpose. Our ability to remain faithful is in His abiding in us and watching over us. He will convict us and teach us. He will warn us and rebuke us when we wander.

Remember also that the heavenly Vinedresser is pruning the branches of the vine. He will reveal the hindrances to growth through the Word. He will convict us of sinful attitudes and behaviours and will prune these wandering branches away. His Spirit motivates our hearts and restores our passion. He rebukes us when we stray and gently leads us back to the path of righteousness. We have the active presence of God remaining in us and working in us. He keeps our hearts, minds and wills connected to the Vine and the purpose of the Vinedresser. Without His abiding presence in us, we would surely fail. Embrace the presence of God in you. Hear the

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voice of God's Spirit and learn to obey. This is the secret to abiding. Jesus makes this very clear when He says:

4 As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15)

There is a fruit that is the result of human effort and planning. This fruit may even be religious in nature. It is interesting to note that the Lord Jesus rebuked religious people more than those who never claimed any religion. The Pharisees were often the subject of His rebuke. While they were religious, the fruit they produced was not a fruit that came from a connection with Him as the vine. They rejected Him as the Messiah. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus told those who prophesied and cast out demons in His name that He never knew them. He compared the fruit of their labours to the fruit of lawlessness (see Matthew 7:23). The fruit these individuals bore was not the result of any connection with Christ but a human effort in His name.

It is possible to build our ministries in our strength and wisdom. We can forge ahead in the work of the Kingdom without abiding in Christ. Our hearts and minds speak of Christ but have very little time to wait on Him and seek His purpose. The result is wild grapes and not the fruit of His presence and enabling. Wild grapes are not the fruit Christ asks of us. So many ministries can be explained by human effort. There is, however, a fruit that cannot be explained by anything other than the presence of the Lord.

Many boast of great things they have done for Christ, but then we meet the few who humbly bow down before Him and, with a heart overwhelmed and broken, cry out: "Lord, thank you for what You have done in me. As unworthy and as

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unqualified as I am, I have experienced Your presence and enabling. To you belongs all the glory."

Any fruit that does not have its source in the true vine is wild fruit. Better a small crop of good fruit than large clusters of wild grapes. If we want to bear fruit worthy of the True Vine, we must remain connected to the Vine. He must supply the strength and wisdom necessary. He must be the source. Our hearts, minds and wills must rest faithfully in tune with the vine if we are to produce the fruit God requires.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we recognize You as the True Vine. We are branches in you. Thank you that because we are branches, Your life flows through us. Thank you that You do not ask us to do what You are unwilling to do in us. You have committed to abide in us. Teach us to draw from you and to know what it means to be led and empowered by Your Spirit in us. Prune away anything that would distract our heart, mind and will and keep them from communion with you. Give us the ability to discern our wisdom from the wisdom of the Spirit. Show us when we are trusting the flesh more than Your Spirit. Keep us from becoming distracted by the abundance of sour grapes and confusing them with the genuine fruit of righteousness. As we trace back the source of our fruitfulness, may that source be the sap of Your Spirit, His leading, His enabling, His wisdom. Teach us to distrust the flesh and its fruit and long for the fruit that cannot be explained any other way but our connection to the True Vine.

Chapter 6 - Much Fruit

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15)

In John 15:5, Jesus reminded His listeners that He was the vine, and they were the branches on the vine. He promised that those who abided in Him and He in them would bear much fruit. The promise of much fruit is for those who meet two qualifications.

The first of these qualifications is that the individual concerned abides in Christ. These individuals have committed their lives to remain faithful to God in heart, mind and will. They are trusting Him and His purpose for their lives and are seeking to live in that purpose. He delights their heart, and His truth fills their mind. Their will is to do His pleasure no matter the cost.

The second qualification in verse 5 is that the Lord also abides in this individual. That is to say, the Spirit of God has taken up residence in their life. This Spirit of Christ has been working in them, transforming them and renewing them from the inside. They are led and empowered by the Spirit of Christ. This same Spirit convicts them of sin and reveals the purpose of God. He prunes away anything that would hinder their spiritual growth and produces the likeness of Christ in them.

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We have here a powerful combination in this two-fold abiding. The heart of the believer is surrendered and submissive to the work of God. The Spirit of God fills that heart and is free to accomplish his powerful work in them.

John 15:5 tells us that when these two qualifications are met, there will be much fruit.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit (John 15:5)

If you want to be fruitful and bear much fruit, you will need the presence of God in you and a heart that is surrendered to Him. This is the secret to producing good fruit.

The requirement for much fruit is not a good education or vast experience. While these things may be useful, they do not guarantee the fruit God desires. God can use the simple and uneducated to accomplish His purpose. We have also seen those who have years of experience and education fail. It is all too easy to depend on the degrees behind our name. A great servant of God once said something to this effect: "Years ago when we called a pastor, we would ask the question, 'Does the fire of the Spirit burn in his bones.' Now we ask, 'where was he educated.'" The shift away from God as the source of all good fruit to our education and theological degrees is deeply concerning.

Jesus tells us in John 15:5 that whoever abides in Him and He in them is the one who will bear "much fruit." Notice that Jesus uses the word "much" here. When the branch is healthy and open to everything that vine offers, the natural result is much fruit. Jesus is the vine, perfect in every way. There is no limit to His resources. When we abide in Him, all His resources are at our disposal. He pours through us and

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empowers our words and deeds. The result will be good fruit and much of it. The key to much fruit is our connection with Christ and His enabling. While our education may be a tool that Christ can use, it is not the source of our fruitfulness. If you want to bear much fruit, you need to be concerned first and foremost about your relationship to Jesus Christ and His Spirit in you.

Jesus goes on in John 15:5 to say that apart from abiding in Him and He in us, we can do nothing. Let's take a moment to consider what Jesus means by this statement.

In Matthew 7:22-23, we read:

[22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7)

In these verses, Jesus speaks about individuals who performed miracles, healed the sick and prophesied in His name. He told them, however, that He did not know them and that their works were works of lawlessness.

The passage leads us to believe that these individuals did miracles and mighty works in the name of Jesus. In other words, they may have healed people and performed unexplainable signs and wonders. Jesus' response to them, however, indicates that they were not abiding in Him.

Consider also the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians:

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will

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become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3)

The apostle Paul compared the fruit of these individuals to wood, hay and straw that would be burned up by the fire of God's judgement. In other words, the quality of their work was inferior. In essence, they produced sour grapes, unfit for the Master's use.

What are we to understand when Jesus tells us that apart from Him, we can do nothing? Surely the workers of Matthew 7 did something when they performed miracles and healed people in the name of Jesus. While the quality of work done by those who built with wood, hay, and straw in 1 Corinthians 3 was inferior, did they not do something?

We understand our dependence on God as the source of life and breath, and indeed, in this sense, we can do nothing without His giving us life. The context of John 15, however, is about abiding in Christ. We can depend on God for life and breath and still not abide in Him.

We have all met unbelievers who do not abide in Christ, nor is His presence in them. These men and women are fully capable of building large businesses that make tremendous profit. Some of them also build large and worldly successful churches.

Notice, however, the response of Jesus to the workers of Matthew 7 –He declares their works to be works of

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lawlessness and declares that He never knew these preachers. In other words, He rejected them and their efforts. The fire of God's judgement in 1 Corinthians 3, burned the wood, hay and straw of believers and left them with nothing to show for a life lived on this earth. Their fruit did not meet God's standard.

God will cast off the sour grapes of worldly effort. He will burn the prideful deeds of those whose intention is only to receive human praise. None of these efforts bring glory to the Vine or the Vinedresser. They will count as nothing before God.

The only fruit that brings glory to Vine and the Vinedresser is the fruit that comes from the True Vine. As believers, we can attempt to do the work of God in our strength and wisdom. We educate ourselves in Bible knowledge and theology, equipping ourselves with the latest principles in church growth. We train in public speaking and counselling and meet in committees to share our insights and experiences. While we do all these things for Christ and His kingdom, we have very little sense of our need of Christ. We pray that God would bless our human efforts and wisdom but fail to seek His heart and purpose.

One of the hardest things for unbelievers to understand is that they can do nothing to merit their salvation. Those who do come to Christ, however, have an equally difficult time understanding that their human efforts to serve Christ in the flesh will amount to nothing in the end. The only fruit that passes the test of God's judgement is the fruit that Christ produces in us and through us. There is a world of difference between our human efforts for Christ and Christ's work in and through us.

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Jesus warns us that if we depend on our human wisdom, planning, skill and education, we will not produce a fruit that glorifies Him. The secret to bearing much good fruit is our connection with Christ. Good fruit is the fruit that Christ produces in us. Our salvation depends entirely on the work of Christ, but so does our service. It is not what we do for Christ that matters, but what Christ does in and through us. Our responsibility is to be an instrument, clean and surrendered to Him. He will guide us in what He wants us to do. He will empower us to do what we cannot do. He will move us in ways we never imagined. Consider what the Lord said through Zechariah:

*6 Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the
LORD of hosts. (Zechariah 4)*

For Prayer:

Father God, we understand that salvation is a gift given to us separate from anything we do. We also know that our fruitfulness in the Christian life and service is also a gift of grace. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that You want to work in and through us. Forgive us for the times we have ignored You and failed to discern what You were doing. Forgive us for believing that we can produce fruit independent of You. Teach us to be instruments through which your Spirit can work. Show us what it means to abide in You and You in us. Help us to see that this is the great secret to good fruit in our lives. Give us less confidence in our flesh and its ability and more in what You can do in us. Teach us the difference between serving in the flesh and being a surrendered vessel in which your Spirit can work.

Chapter 7 - The Grace to Produce Fruit

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15)

In the last chapter, Jesus reminded His listeners that they could not produce good fruit apart from Him. As we move to verse 7, our Lord makes a promise to those who abide in Him. He assured all who abided in Him that He would give them all they needed to produce the fruit the Father expected from them.

In John 15:7, the Lord Jesus tells those who abide in Him that they can ask whatever they wished, and it would be done for them. This is a bold promise and one that is often taken out of context. Some interpret this verse to mean that Jesus is obligated to give them whatever their heart desires. Remember, however, that we must understand this verse in its context.

The context of this promise of Jesus in John 15:7 is His teaching about the vine and the branches. Jesus is instructing His listeners on the will of the Father for their fruitfulness in the Christian life. Notice also that the promise of Jesus in verse 7 begins with the word “if.” This small word is of utmost importance and sets the conditions for what follows. The word “if” implies that the Lord Jesus is under no obligation to fulfill

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the promise unless certain conditions are met. Let's take a moment to consider the conditions of Jesus' promise here.

Jesus introduces His promise with these words: "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you.*" There are two conditions in this phrase.

If You Abide in Me

The first condition to the promise of Jesus is that the individual must abide in Him. We have already examined this to some extent in this study, so we will not repeat this. To abide in Christ is to remain faithful to Him in heart, mind and will.

It is possible to do all the right things, but have a heart that is far from the Lord. This was often the case for the Pharisees of the New Testament. To abide in Christ, however, is to be in a place where our hearts are committed to resting in Him and His purpose, our minds are settled and convinced about the truth He taught, and our will is devoted to doing what He wants us to do. The person who abides in Christ is one whose heart, mind and will are surrendered to Christ and resting in His purpose for their lives.

If My Words Abide in You

Notice the second condition to the promise of Christ in John 15:7—"my words abide in you." Listen to the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:

136 My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law. (Psalm 119)

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163 I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law. (Psalm 119)

Notice the heart of the Psalmist regarding the Word of the Lord. It grieved him when the law of God was ignored. He delighted in the law of God and spoke of his great love for it. For the Psalmist, to have God's word abiding in him implied delight and obedience.

Consider also the words of Joshua:

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1)

Notice Joshua's challenge to his people regarding the Book of the Law of God.

First, Joshua told his people that the Book of the Law was never to depart from their mouths. In other words, they were never to stop speaking about it. It was to be the subject of their conversations and a regular topic discussed among themselves. We speak about those things that are dearest to us. When someone is very passionate about something, it is hard to get them to stop talking about it. Joshua is telling his people that the Law of God was to be such a passion in their hearts that they could never stop talking about it to others.

Second, Joshua challenged his people to meditate on the Law of God day and night. The implication was that Israel was to study the Law so they could know its requirements and promises. They were to fill their mind with the insights and teaching of the Law.

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Finally, Joshua encouraged his people to be careful to do everything written in that law. This was an act of the will. Their delight in the Book of the Law was not in intellectual one only. They were also to walk in obedience to all its requirements.

What does this tell us about having God's word abiding in us? When the Word of God abides in us, it affects our heart, mind and will. It becomes our delight and motivation in life, and we feed on it like a hungry scholar seeking to understand its truth. We develop a deep passion for obeying and living in its truth. We are exercised to do what it says, and it grieves us when that Word is ignored or disobeyed.

Notice one final detail in the words of Joshua. Joshua told his people that if they did not let this word depart from their mouth, meditated day and night on it and were careful to do what it said, then they would make their way prosperous and have success:

For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

Joshua is saying what the Lord Jesus tells us in John 15:7. If God's people allowed His law to abide in them, the path was opened for the blessing of God to flow –they would be prosperous and successful.

Jesus tells us here that the blessing of God will flow for those who abide in Him and have His word abide in them. Those who can claim this promise are individuals whose hearts, minds and wills are devoted entirely to God and His purpose.

To these people, the Lord Jesus says, "Ask what you wish." It is very dangerous to make a promise to grant someone whatever they wish. In fact, it would be irresponsible to do so

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unless we have a deep and full confidence in the individual to whom we were making this promise. Jesus does not make this promise to just anyone. It is made only to those who abide in Him and have His word abide in them. He knows the heart, mind and will of these individuals. He knows that they are in full agreement with Him and His purpose. He knows that their heart is to walk with Him and bring Him glory. He knows that His word directs them. The requests they make of Him will be in tune with His purpose and be for the honour of His name. These individuals will have access to His blessings for they walk with Him and share His heart.

The promise of the Lord Jesus to those who abide in Him and in whom His word dwells is that they can ask what they wish, and He will grant their request. The desire of those in whom Christ lives is that His name is lifted high. They desire that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus told those who accused him of casting out demons in the name of Satan that any kingdom divided against itself would fall (see Mark 3:22-26). For this reason, the storehouses of the kingdom of heaven are not open to just anyone. Listen to what the apostle James had this to say about unanswered prayers:

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 3)

The treasures of heaven are not handed out to those who misuse them. Jesus had some strong words to say about this:

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6 “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (Matthew 7)

When heavenly gifts are misused, they may be taken from us and given to someone who will put them to better use. This appears to be the lesson Jesus taught in the parable of the talents. When the unfaithful servant did not invest the money given to him, the master took it away and gave it to the servant to had been faithful:

28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 25)

The Lord Jesus promised that if we are committed to Him and His word, He will supply us with everything we need to bear fruit to the glory of the Father.

Notice again that the fruit we bear is not the result of good education and years of experience. The quality of our fruit does not depend on our hard work or skilled efforts. Everything depends on the grace of God in answering our cry for help and provision. The condition for this supply is that we abide in Him and His word.

Do we want to know the fullness of God's blessing? The key to this great blessing is in John 15:7. Those who abide in Christ and let His word abide in them can ask what they wish, and the Heavenly Father will be delighted to hear and answer their request for the glory of His name and the expansion of His kingdom.

For Prayer

Lord Jesus, you show us in John 15:7 that the secret to the power and blessing of God in our lives is to abide in Christ and let His Word abide in us. This implies loving and obeying You. Forgive us for the times we have focused more on doing great things for You than on loving and obeying You. Teach us that genuine fruit only comes from the life of one who is abiding in You and Your Word.

Lord, we have often believed that we could honour You by presenting our efforts tainted with sin. While we have tried to do good deeds, the strength and wisdom for those deeds have often come from the stagnant pool of human resources. How different it is when what we bring to you is the work of your Spirit in us. How pleased You are when we draw from Your supply –when we submit to your leading rather than our agendas and trust Your enabling than our experience. Teach us to cry out more for this supply. Show us our inability to serve you in the flesh. Thank you that the vast resources of heaven are made available to all who will abide in you and let your Word abide in them. We cry out for those resources now. Teach us to abide in You and Your Word. Fill us to overflowing so that we can bear fruit worthy of your name.

Chapter 8 - Fruit that Glorifies the Father

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

In the last verse of this study, notice what the Lord Jesus says about the fruit we produce. He tells us that His Father is glorified in the production of much fruit. Before we proceed, let's take a moment to consider the verse in its context.

Notice the words "much fruit" in verse 8. We saw this phrase in verse 5, where Jesus said:

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15)

Jesus defines "much fruit" in verse 5 as the result of abiding in Him and having His word abide in us. When Jesus uses the same words in John 15:8, we need to assume that He is speaking about the same kind of fruit. This is not the fruit of human effort and planning, but rather the result of a profound and intimate connection to the Lord Jesus as the Vine.

Add to this the fact that in the Gospels, Jesus often condemned religious leaders who, though busy in service, did not abide in Him. The Pharisees were very diligent and faithful workers, but Jesus spoke harshly to them about their hypocrisy.

Much Fruit

We have also examined the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:

22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7)

In Matthew 7, Jesus speaks about individuals who were busy in Christian service, prophesying, casting out demons and doing mighty works in His name, but described their efforts as works of “lawlessness.” Their efforts would certainly not bring glory to God.

When he speaks about “much fruit” in this verse, Jesus refers to fruit that is the result of abiding in Him. In other words, it is the work of the Vine in us and not our personal efforts.

By This My Father is Glorified

Jesus teaches us that the Father is glorified by “much fruit.” Remember that the Father in this parable is the Vinedresser. When the vine produces much fruit, it is not the vine that receives the praise but the Vinedresser. The vinedresser takes the time to care for the vine. He plants it in the right soil, prunes the unfruitful branches, and fertilizes the ground so that the vine can receive the nutrients necessary. He also waters the plant and chooses the best location to obtain the right amount of sunlight. He pulls out the weeds so they do not choke out the vine.

The fruitfulness of the vine is dependent on the work of the Vinedresser. When the vine yields much fruit, every eye is on the Vinedresser. People admire His devotion to the vine and

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His skill in making it produce such an abundance of sweet grapes.

It is the work of the Vinedresser that makes “much fruit” possible. If a branch on the vine is fruitful, it is due to the hard work of the Vinedresser. Every branch on the vine must come to this understanding –all glory will go to the Vinedresser. Every good fruit we produce is thanks to the life of the vine sustaining us and the care of the Vinedresser, making us productive. All we can do to assure this fruit is to remain connected to the vine and submissive to the Vinedresser’s work.

Pride wants to keep the glory due to the Vinedresser for ourselves. We want to believe that we are responsible for the good fruit we have produced. The reality, however, is that it is the Vine who produces this fruit in us. Our role is to submit and allow Him to use us to bear His fruit. For the true believer, to be such an instrument is one of life’s greatest privileges.

Then we say, but I surrendered to the Lord, surely it was my willingness to make this sacrifice that enabled the Vine to produce such fruit in me. Does a defeated soldier take credit for laying down his or her arms? Our surrender is a surrender of defeat. It is a recognition that we cannot do anything of eternal significance without God.

All who abide in Christ are content to see the Father receive glory for the fruit their lives bear. Their response to the fruit produced in their lives is one of humble gratitude. They are thrilled that a holy and eternal God would see fit to use a defeated and useless branch to bear much fruit for His glory. They are amazed at His work and thankful for His willingness to use them despite their unworthiness.

Much Fruit

That You Bear Much Fruit

Notice also from verse 8 that the Father is glorified when the branch produces “much” fruit. How easy it is to be content to see God use us once in our lifetime. We can be satisfied with so little. Imagine the branch saying: “I remember the year that I bore much fruit.” The word “much,” however, is not limited to one-time in our life. It is an ongoing harvest. No matter where you are in life, the Father is glorified when you produce much fruit.

You may be facing a difficult time in your life. The Father is glorified when you produce much fruit in your pain. You may be coming to the end of your life. Don’t be content to say, “I lived a life what bore much fruit, now I can rest. God is also glorified when you produce much fruit in old age.

Do you want to glorify God as the Vinedresser? Then you will need to bear much fruit. But you say, I’m going through a difficult time now? It doesn’t matter what you are going through; bearing fruit does not depend on you but the Father. He will produce in you the fruit He desires. That fruit may be the fruit of a godly attitude to face your struggle. Until your dying breath, God will continue to work in you. The heavenly Vinedresser desires to use you to the end. He may put you in a particular situation to use your example to bless others. We may retire from our earthly jobs, but the Father desires that we continue to bear fruit.

If you want to glorify God, then you need to be bearing much fruit – “by this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit” (John 15:8). Allow the Father to continue His work in You. The fruit He wants to produce may not look the same as it once

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did. Be assured, however, that if you are abiding in Him and His Word is abiding in you, then the fruit of God's Work will continue to grow in you. God will transform you into the image of His Son. He will produce the fruit of His Spirit greater measure. God will continue to use you to bring glory to His name. Be open to the Vine and what He wants to do. Allow Him to lead you and transform you. As long as you have life and breath, God desires to produce much fruit in you.

Prove to be My Disciples

Notice one final detail in verse 8. Jesus tells us that by bearing much fruit, we prove to be His disciples. In other words, the fruit we bear is evidence that we belong to the Lord Jesus. Many see this to mean that if someone does great things for Jesus, that individual must belong to Him. There will, however, be many surprises in Heaven. As we have seen, there will be those who stand before Jesus and say: "Lord, I cast out demons and prophesied in your name." Jesus will say, however, "I never knew you. You are not my disciple" (see Matthew 7:22-23). Doing great things for Jesus is not proof that we are His disciples. Consider the words of Isaiah:

6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64)

Isaiah tells us that all our "righteous deeds" are like a polluted garment. The use of the term "righteous deeds" shows us that not all religious service is accepted by God. We tend to believe that this passage is only for the unbeliever. Somehow, we think that when we come to the Lord Jesus, our flesh can

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then produce righteous deeds. This is not how the apostle Paul saw things. Writing in Romans 7, he said:

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. (Romans 7)

Even as a believer, Paul knew that his flesh was contrary to God and His purpose. It was sinful, and every effort of that flesh was tainted with sin. Paul was not defeated by this reality, however, because he knew that the Lord God had done something extraordinary in Him. Writing to the Romans, the apostle would say:

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8)

Paul placed no confidence in His flesh. His confidence was in the Spirit of Christ, who lived in Him. His fleshly efforts counted for nothing, but the work of the Spirit of Christ in Him was powerful. He stepped out empowered by that Spirit to produce “much fruit.” He would not take credit for any of this work, for it was not His work for God but the work of the Spirit in Him. This was the same for all the disciples. They were led and empowered by the Spirit of Christ in their service. While

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the work of their flesh was tainted with sin, the work of the Spirit in them was perfect. The Spirit of Christ was transforming them and using them to accomplish the work of the Father.

Who among us has not stood back and wondered at that transforming work of God's Spirit in their lives? Who has not seen Him uproot evil desires and attitudes to change us into the image of Jesus? We stand back and realize that we cannot take credit for this transformation. We see our shortcomings and inadequacies, yet the power of God seems to work through us? We cannot attribute our success to anything but the work of God and His favour upon us.

The work of God in us defies human logic. He chooses the weak of this world to accomplish His purpose. His ways are not our ways –He does what makes no sense to us. We must not confuse human effort with the work of God's Spirit. Our human effort produces wild grapes, but those who abide in the vine produce much fruit that glorifies the Father as the source.

The fruit of God's work in us brings glory to His name. The nature of this fruit demonstrates that it is from God. We may do many things for God in our flesh, but the aroma of sin and human effort will always flow from those works. Only what the Spirit of Christ does in and through us will bring honour to the Father for this work points everyone to the Father as the source of fruitfulness.

For Prayer

Father, we confess that our efforts to serve you fall short. Thank you that through the work of Your Son Jesus, we can experience the work of Your Spirit. Thank you that You want to do a work in us. We have seen how you have been transforming us into the image of the Lord Jesus day by day. You have been cleansing our hearts and producing the fruit of godly character in us. We also see evidence of your leading and empowering in service. You give us words of comfort for others. You lead us to places we would never have gone ourselves. You provide us with the strength to do what we cannot do in our flesh. You give us boldness beyond our personalities to move into territory that would typically have paralyzed us with fear. As we look at what you are doing, we understand that this is not our work but Yours in us. We lay down arms like defeated soldiers and exhausted athletes who could not finish the course in their strength. As we surrender to You, You are pleased to pour Your strength and wisdom into us. Teach us to be aware of Your work in us. We recognize that it is not our fleshly efforts that will bring glory to the Father but the efforts of Your Spirit in us. May the fruit Your Spirit produces in and through us bring great honour and glory to the Father who is working His purposes out through us.

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

Tens of thousands of these books have been distributed and are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books are now being translated into a variety of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

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