

## AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP – FRUITFULNESS

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**Scripture:** John 15: 1-8

The past couple of weeks we've been looking at discipleship and what being a disciple of Jesus looks like, or ought to look like, as we look at our own lives through the grid of Scripture. And the first thing we said was that it involves submission to the will of God. Last week we looked at obedience and said that a disciple has to be obedient as well to his Master. He/she cannot just listen and then walk away. And as we unpacked obedience, we saw that we can look at it from a quadrilateral aspect – four areas that we could pinpoint among a few:

- To do what God wanted us to do
- To be what God wanted us to be
- To go where He wanted us to go
- To say what He wanted us to say.

We were able to look at our own hearts and ask the question: Are we being faithful and obedient to all of these areas?

Today, I want to submit to you another important trait of being a disciple – to be fruitful.

### BE FRUITFUL

#### **What does fruitful mean?**

It means that there's productivity in our lives. There's an abundance, bountiful effect, flourishing, plentiful, prolific. But when we look carefully at Scripture, we find that right in the very beginning, this is the first command that was given to humanity.

Genesis 1:28 *The Lord told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply.*

When we talk about being prolific or being bountiful, we must be very careful that we define fruit well, because to be prolific in things doesn't mean that it is good fruit, especially for us as Christians. The things that we think might be fruit in our lives may not on that final day.

Paul tells us very clearly in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

*If anyone builds on this foundation (that is the foundation of Jesus or the salvific experience that we've had), using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

So we need to watch out for the things that we may call fruit in our lives. every now and then, do a checklist and say: Does it align with Scripture? Does it align with God's purposes for me? Or are the things that I'm doing – they look like fruit but they are not in terms of a biblical mandate. So our mandate as disciples of Jesus is to be fruitful.

#### **How can we be fruitful?**

Now, just before Jesus left, He sat down with His disciples.

John 15:1-8

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.”*

While these words may seem to be repetitive, they are not. Allow me to place before you salient points that I think have come out of these 8 verses.

**Branches that don't bear fruit will be cut off.** If there is no fruit on the branch, that branch is going to be cut off.

**Fruitful branches will be pruned to bear even more fruit.** These branches will be snipped here and there. Those are things in our lives that God is still working out. That's the sanctifying process. Every now and then, He needs to prune us so that there will be more fruit.

**Fruit comes from being connected to Jesus or abiding in Him** (vv. 4-5). And to abide is a verb. It's an active word here. Abiding in Christ is not a feeling or just a belief that we can have. It means to remain or stay, and entails more than just a belief that Jesus is the Savior. It's more than that. What does that mean? Let me illustrate it to bring home the point that to believe doesn't necessarily mean to trust.

Pierre Blondin was a French tightrope walker. One day he said that he would cross the Niagara Falls from the Canadian side to the American side. They put a tightrope steel wire, and he was to cross it. crowds gathered on both sides – the American side and the Canadian side. And he had this balancing pole and he walked right across, to the cheers of the crowd.

He reached the other side and then asked the question: “How many of you believe that I can push a wheelbarrow across on this tight wire?” And everybody said, “We believe, we believe. We believe you can do it.” And so he took a wheelbarrow, which has one wheel and two handles, and balancing that, he crossed from one side to the other. When he got to the other side, he asked: “How many of you believe that I can take somebody sitting in this wheelbarrow across?” And everybody said, “We believe, we believe.” Then he said: “Who will be that person?” And there was pin drop silence. Because it's one thing to say you believe and another to trust somebody with your life.

To be a disciple is more than just believing that Jesus died for you, believing that He saved you; it is saying: I trust You with my life. I trust that what You want is the best for my life. I trust Your plans more than my plans. I trust that every stronghold that I am getting caught into can be broken because You are above all. So it means that we are able to abide, but in an active, dynamic way.

**If we are not connected to Him, not abiding in Him, there can be no fruit, and you will be thrown away and burned.** In other words, just being a branch doesn't mean that you will bear fruit. Have you ever seen a branch not connected to the tree, bearing fruit? Let's go find mangoes. O, there's a branch on the ground, we're sure to find mangoes there. No! You look for the tree. The branch is as productive as it is connected into the tree. And Jesus is saying: “It's the same with Me. You cannot be productive as a disciple if you're not connected into Me. Every good thing flows from Me into you so

that you bear fruit. If you're not connected into Me, there can be no fruit. And a branch that doesn't bear fruit is only fit to be burned."

### **God is glorified when we bear fruit.**

**Fruit-bearing proves that we are His disciples.** So today, if you're saying "I'm a disciple of Jesus," the question would be: Can you see the fruit? Is there fruit in your lives that proves it, because the Bible says that is proof that you're really a disciple of Jesus. There is something very heavy about that statement. Because we say we are saved, and when we say we are saved, we become disciples. And yet, if there is no fruit in our lives, then the Bible says you're not really a disciple. And I kept coming back to that because that is a heavy statement. The Bible is saying if there is no fruit, it negates everything else. The discipleship that flows from a salvation experience – all of it gets negated if there is no fruit. So suddenly, these eight verses become very profound, especially for you and me who claim to be disciples of Jesus.

Another interesting fact in these eight verses was that **there's a progression**. In v.2 it says that you will bear fruit, and then it says you will bear more fruit. And then it says in v.5 you will bear much fruit. Then in vs.16 it says that you will go and bear fruit and that fruit will last. Bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit, and lasting fruit. That's how disciples live their lives here on earth. And the key to fruit is abiding in Him, being connected to Him. Jesus says that we can bear fruit only if we are connected to Him. "As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, no neither can you unless you abide in Me. And apart from Me you can do nothing."

### **How do we stay connected into Him?**

How do we stay connected into Him that we ensure that there is fruit in our lives? how can we be spiritually productive? If we look at the same metaphor, a branch gets strength, nourishment, protection, everything from the vine. And if it's broken off, it quickly dies and becomes unfruitful.

I love the story of Dwight L. Moody who noticed that there was one member of the church who was absent for a few Sundays. And so he decided to pay him a visit. So he went there and found the man sitting in front of a fire. Both of them talked for a while, and then he asked him, "How come you're not coming to church?" And he replied, "I'm fine. I read the Bible, I do my things here, and I'm fine at home." And Moody leaned over, with the tongs, took out a piece of coal and kept it to one side. And they kept talking. After some time, the coal went out. Then he said, "That's what happens when you stay by yourself."

Church is not just something that we do as a ritual. It's a place where iron sharpens iron. It's a place where we come together, we grow from each other, we give to each other. As I said last time, it's never about what you get from church; what you get is only 50%. The other 50% is what you give. That's why spiritual gifts are so important.

**How are we nurturing the spiritual life** to make sure that we are connected into Jesus? What are we doing? What do we need to do? The most obvious thing will be that we don't neglect our spiritual life. We don't neglect the disciplines that we have to put in.

- **Reading the word of God.**

Do we read the word of God? Do we revel in what it says. Do we get up every morning and say: I want to read the Word. I want to find out more about who God is, find out a new trait about Him, to know how much He cares for me, how much He loves me, that He's got my back, that He's got purposes and plans for me. I want to see Him in history, how He's worked there.

This last month I was with Dr. Steve Seamands, and we were having a meal and chatting about different things in our lives and people who had touched our lives. and he said, "I'm so thankful for the people who invested into me because they gave me a hunger for the word of God. Today I get up every day and I can't wait to open the Bible and see what it has to give me."

What a wonderful perspective! Sometimes all we can think of is: let me just get by that once verse that came up on our Daily Bread, or whichever book we're following. Or even a chapter, and then I'm done for the day. Disciples grow in love with the Word, with the word of God. Do we have that kind of relationship?

- **Prayer.**

Do we skimp on prayer? Is the only prayer we say before a meal or at the end of a day, or just before there's something very difficult; an examination or an interview? Or is prayer an integral part of your life? Because what is prayer? it is talking with the Master. And disciples who don't talk to the Master don't learn anything. Can you imagine being a disciple of somebody and not having any communication? It's the same with God. Do we have a vital prayer life?

I've been so encouraged seeing so many of you on the Wednesday bible study. And I pray that it is transforming your life. These are the disciplines that you need to be investing into – take part in a bible study that is offered by the church, make sure that you're part of the prayer that we do on Fridays. While I revel in the knowledge that so many joined on a Friday and we had so many covering the whole day. I'm saddened when I see how many of you have read the letter but haven't bothered to write and say: I'm going to be praying. I don't understand it. If you're part of the church, if you're part of what God is doing, and that's what we believe, that God places these things upon our hearts. There's so much more in a community that comes together in prayer than a single prayer request. And those are things that you need to be part of. Those are spiritual disciplines that you and I need to be part of as disciples of Jesus, to grow in our prayer lives.

- **Be aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.**

Are you aware that the Holy Spirit is in you, that He resides in you? And if you are aware, then are you paying attention to Him? Because He's there for a purpose. He's the One who's constantly assuring us as we go through life's journey, that God has got you. God has got you in this situation, God has got you in this challenge, God has got you in this purpose. That's what He does. And when we say, "But I don't have what it takes to do that," He says, "I'll empower you." He is the power source. 'Dunamis', dynamite within us. That's why when Jesus said, "Be My disciples", He knew it was possible for us. He would never have asked us something like this if it was not possible.

- **The fruit is unique to each one of us.**

Your fruit may look different from somebody else's fruit, and that's God's intention. So we don't look at each other and pass comments on the fruit. The fruit is dependent on the things that God has given to us, and each one of us is uniquely made. The purpose that each of us has is different, and so will the fruit look different. And at the end of it we need to be able to say: Yes, I did. I used the things that You gave me so that there would be fruit.

We look at Matthew, the parable of the slaves, and Jesus saying that you have to be ready because a time of reckoning can come just like that. Be aware of that and be able to evaluate the fruit in our lives constantly.

## **EVALUATING THE TRUE VINE METAPHOR**

Jesus is the true vine obviously. The branches who abide in Him are the ones who are truly saved, and they have a real and vital connection to the Savior.

### **Withered branches don't bear fruit.**

The withered branches who do not abide in Him are the ones who may pretend or the ones who don't really understand what it means to be saved. They think they are saved because: maybe I was born into a Christian home, or maybe because I come to church regularly. But they have never had a moment where they have accepted Jesus, where you come to a place where you said, "I am a sinner and I need a Savior. Lord, You went to the cross for me. You paid the penalty for my sin. I accept Your sacrifice to be given on my behalf. Would You come and live in my heart? I want to be Your follower."

If you've never had that kind of an experience, that's not what the Bible talks about when it says "You're saved." You can be doing all kinds of good work, but if you didn't come to that moment when you accepted that you were a sinner, and you needed a Savior, and you accepted Jesus as that Savior, then you would fall in the category of those who think they are saved but are not saved.

Salvation needs a personal encounter with God. I meet so many people who answer to the question: Have you met Jesus? "Yeah, I think so. We have always been in church. In fact, my parents, grandparents all have been in church. We're Christians." You're missing it. That's not what it means to be a Christian. So Jesus says that if we have a feigned attachment to the vine, then there will be no fruit. We will be more pretenders or thinking that we are Christians but are not. Both Peter and Judas seemed identical in their walk with Christ. But Peter was attached to the vine, Judas was not.

John, in his epistle 1 John 2:19, restates this withered principle by saying: "They (i.e. people now opposed to Christ) went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us, but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

### **Perseverance.**

If you've had that kind of a moment, a true encounter with Jesus, then other things must ensue. And one of them is that you persevere. Perseverance is a trait of a Christian disciple – sustained abiding in Christ.

Revelation 2:26 "He who overcomes." When we look at a life of being a disciple, it comes with all its problems and issues, but to him or her that overcomes those problems, the Bible says "and he who keeps my deeds until the end (so overcome and then move, keep on right to the end), to him I will give authority over the nations" (i.e. they will abide or remain in Him).

The Bible has an encouraging word in Philippians: "The work that I start in you," I started that work right? When you became a Christian, when you became My disciple, I started a work in you. And the Word says, "I will carry it on to completion." Now why will it not be carried on to completion? If there is disobedience in the middle. It can only be carried on to completion if we are listening and doing what God wants us to do. Otherwise, this verse gets neutralized.

God will not work against our will. He'll complete the work and then they will bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. So if you have a salvation experience, then a true one will bring out good fruit. You will bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples. So I want to state this: Abiding is not what saves us but it is one of the signs of salvation. It is one of the signs that you have a true salvation experience with God.

### **Proof of Abiding in Him.**

What is expected of those who abide?

1. **Obedience:** Ones who abide, obey.

John 15:10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in them. So obedience to the word of God is so critical. Beloved, just ask yourself as a disciple of Jesus, when Jesus tells you something, is your answer constantly – No Lord, sorry. I can't do that. No Lord, sorry, I can't change. I won't be able to do this. I won't say this to somebody. I can't be. Is that the response?

2. **Emulate Jesus.** If He's the Master, the disciple must want to be like the Master. So we yearn to emulate Jesus.  
1 John 2:6 "The one who says he abides in Him (that is Jesus) ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." That's what Scripture says. We have to walk in the same manner as Jesus walked. Emulate the Master.
3. **We need to live free of habitual sins.** We sin and then we confess. But there are some sins that we continue to do. They're an integral part of our life, or the baggage that we carry. And we continue to be Christian, act Christian, and yet there's this habitual sin that you carry, and you know is sinful. "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because no one who abides in Him sins." And He's talking about continued habitual sin.
4. **Have a keen awareness of the divine presence of God in our lives.** Do you know that as disciples, we carry God's presence with us? Do we showcase Him? Are we aware of that? by this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit. His Spirit is within us.

So the litmus test for us, a checklist would be to check these four areas: obedience, Jesus as an example, living free of habitual sin and a keen awareness of the Holy Spirit. Let me say this about the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit is given the moment that we accept Jesus as Savior. God gives Him as a down payment actually, to ensure that we will one day be in eternity with Him. But the question for us is: Is the Holy Spirit locked up in one room? Or does He have access to all of you?

I mentioned Steve Seamands. His uncle, J.T. Seamands. In fact, J.T., David Seamands and their father have served more than 100 years in India. They gave their lives in the early days. But we have the opportunity of being with J.T. Seamands when we were at seminary. And he tells this story. And he tells this story. He says:

I pack my bags and I go to this particular place. I'm met by my host with whom I'm going to stay for those days. We enter his house and he says, "Brother JT, let me show you to your room." And he takes me to my room and says, "This is your room. I hope you'll be comfortable here." Then he says, "By the way, let me show you the living room. We have a piano there as well as a television. If you'd like to watch or play, feel free. And if you get hungry, the kitchen is here. We have a stocked refrigerator; feel free." And then he says, "Enjoy yourself," and he leaves. I know that he has shown me only three rooms in the seven rooms that are in this house. And what he has actually told me is that I can go to these three rooms and not the other rooms. I have limited ability to go into any of the other rooms. I cannot. Implicit within showing me three rooms is that the other four rooms are out of bounds. JT continues: when I go home, I get out of my car, take my bag in, open the door, put my bag in the house. I look around the house and I say: I have access to every room in this house. I am a resident here; there I was a guest.

Then he asks the question: Is the Holy Spirit a guest or a resident in your life? how many rooms have you handed over to him and how many rooms have you not? And a disciple of Jesus, with a keen awareness of why the Holy Spirit is within us must hand over the key bunch. The whole key bunch needs to be handed over to Him.

Another way of looking at this would be to ask questions. Is there any disobedience today that you know of to His commands? Is there any disobedience? Is there something that God is asking of you that you're saying "No" to? Disciples obey. Is there something in your life that wouldn't be found in Jesus? When you look at your life, is there something that you harbor that you know Jesus wouldn't have harbored? Is there something in your life that you know you would never find in Jesus? Because disciples must be like the Master. Are you living free? Are you caught up in some habitual sin? Do you know Him as miracle worker, way maker? The One who can break the bonds of anything that strangles His children? Do you know Him? Do you know His power, the *dunamis* dynamite power that is resident in you that you don't need to be captive to habitual sin, that He will break its power?

Is the Holy Spirit just a prisoner in your heart or is He free? Does He have free access in your lives. fruitfulness is a key trait of being a disciple.

Bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit, and then lasting fruit.

Amen.