

# **HOW'S YOUR FRUIT?**

## **FOUR LEVELS OF FRUITFULNESS**

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### **PART I**

John 15:1-8

Jesus gave us a picture to help us understand our role in bearing fruit for God. As you can see it takes a group effort to bear good fruit. The Vinedresser, The Vine and The Branches, let's look at the purpose of each one.

### **FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER**

A Vinedresser is more than a mere farmer and grapes are more than an annual crop. The Vinedresser's grapevines remain with him for decades. He comes to know each one in a personal way, much like a shepherd with his sheep. He knows how the vine is doing from year to year and which ones are more productive or vigorous than others. He knows what they respond to and what special care certain ones need. Every vine has its own personality and the Vinedresser comes to know it over the years. The Vinedresser cares for each vine and nurtures it, pruning it the appropriate amount at the appropriate times, fertilizing it, lifting its branches from the ground and propping them or tying them to a trellis and taking measures to protect them from insects and disease. The Vinedresser's task is simple - to coax from his plants the most pounds of grapes possible. A healthy and properly tended vineyard means a higher yield of fruit.

### **JESUS IS THE VINE**

The vine is the source of life for the branches. It provides the water and nutrients by which the grapes are produced. Without the vine, no fruit could ever result. Branches are totally dependent upon the vine. The vine has one purpose and that is to produce fruit. The reason the vine desires to produce fruit is so that the Vinedresser will receive the honor. When fruit is yielded in a vineyard the vine, the branches, the soil even the fruit does not get the credit. All the glory passes on to the Vinedresser. The vine is the trunk of the plant that grows out of the ground.

### **WE ARE THE BRANCHES**

The branches are the focus of the Vinedresser's efforts because they produce the fruit. Branches are tied to a trellis or propped up with a sticks to let air circulate to provide the maximum amount of sunshine and to allow full access for tending. The Vinedresser lovingly cultivates each branch so that it will bear as much fruit as possible. To cultivate means to nurture, help grow, improve and prepare. The branches can't produce fruit without the vine. It withers and dies, it has no source of life without the vine. As disciples of Jesus, We don't live life on our own terms. Father tends, Jesus supplies and we draw our strength from obediently following His directive word.

## **WHAT IS FRUIT?**

### **Galatians 5:22**

Let's look at what it means to bear each of these fruits.

Love - Warmth, tenderness. Look at what the word says love is: patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, it's not proud, it does not dishonor others, it's not self seeking, it's not easily angered, it keeps not record of wrongs, it does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects , always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Peace - Tranquility- Absence of mental stress or anxiety, an absence of tension or worry.

Patience - The capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble or suffering without getting angry or upset.

Kindness - The quality of being friendly, generous and considerate.

Goodness - Righteousness, integrity, honest, truthful, decency, respectability, compassion and sympathy.

Faithfulness - Devoted, loyal, constant, dependable and reliable.

Gentleness - Kind, an absence of a bad temper, considerate.

Self-control - The quality that allows you to stop yourself from doing things

you want to do but that might not be in your best interest.

We bear inner fruit when we allow The Father to nurture in us a new Christ like quality. We bear outward fruit when we allow The Father to work through us to bring Him glory.

The fruit of the spirit is not what we do but who we are and it is primarily on display in our lives when circumstances are unfavorable. Character transformation occurs when we submit to The Father giving Him complete control of our lives only then will the spirit be free to produce fruit that remains even in the deepest, darkest storms. We all know that developing the fruit of the spirit takes diligence and determination. So many times it seems that a tiny incident can take us from the love walk. When this happens it seems that we can literally see the fruit falling off of us. We must be in close intimate fellowship with Father everyday being obedient to the voice of the Holy Spirit and following His lead. To be an effective witness for Father we must stay in the love walk and stay on the vine.

We want our fruit to be ripe not rotten.

Over the next few weeks I'm going to talk about the Four Levels of Fruitfulness.

Next week I'll be talking about Basket 1 - No fruit and Basket 2- Some fruit.

## **PART II**

Last week we learned what role The Father, Jesus and We play in fruit bearing and what fruit was and let's look again at the different roles all three play.

Each of us is a branch that is producing a clearly defined level of abundance.

Here are the Four Baskets or Levels of fruit bearing:

Basket one- No Fruit

Basket two- Some Fruit

Basket three- More Fruit

Basket four - Much Fruit

Tonight we are going to look at Basket one and two- No Fruit and Some Fruit.

For the vineyard to really produce the branches have to respond to the attentions of the Vinedresser. But as we'll see, all branches do not respond alike. In fact, every branch in the vineyard is unique and when harvest day arrives each will have produced a different- sized crop.

The Father wants more fruit from us, so much that He actively tends our lives so we will keep moving up from a barren to a productive branch, from an empty to an overflowing basket. And more is always possible. Why you ask? Because we were created to bear fruit, more fruit and still more fruit.

We are going to look at that first and second basket and the barren branch that goes with it. You'll see why some good hearted Christians get stuck for years in turmoil, pain and want and you'll understand why it doesn't have to be so.

### John 15:2

When branches grow along the ground the leaves get coated with dust, when it rains they get muddy and mildewed. The branches become sick and useless. When the branches fall in the dirt The Vinedresser doesn't throw them away or abandon them. He lifts them up, cleans them off and helps them flourish again. And He does this by laying us on someone's heart or giving them a word for us, He may show us in His word. But we have to be willing for Him to heal us, He will not force it on us.

Catherine the bright women we met earlier, was trapped in a gray world of disappointment and pain. Yet she mistook these symptoms for the underlying problem which in her case was un forgiveness, bitterness, anger, hatred, and vengefulness. Father wanted her heart and soul healthy and her life yielding fruit. He knew that deep down her empty basket was part of her misery.

If your basket has no fruit or some fruit the Vinedresser is kneeling beside you in the cool of the morning and He is reaching down to intervene in your life to lift you up and bring you back to fruitfulness. He doesn't see a chronic loser in you but a chosen, carefully tended branch that is one choice away from an altogether better existence.

Next week we will be looking at Basket Three-More Fruit- Pruning

### **PART III**

Last week we talked about Basket One-No fruit and Basket Two- Some fruit. Tonight we will take a peek in Basket Three-More fruit. And to produce more fruit there has to be pruning. Ouch!!

#### **John15:2**

The definition of pruning is to remove anything considered undesirable or superfluous. Superfluous means unneeded or uncalled for.

Fathers strategy for coaxing a greater harvest out of His branches is not the one you and I prefer. His plan is to prune, which means to thin, to reduce, or to cutoff. Without pruning growing Christians will only be able to live up to a fraction of their potential.

In the vineyard an expert pruner applies his skills in four specific ways to remove growth that is dead or dying, to make sure sunlight can get to all fruit-bearing branches, to increase the size and quality of the fruit and to encourage new fruit to develop.

Our Father the Vinedresser is guided by similar principles to make room for the kind of abundance He created us for. He must first cut away parts of our lives that drain precious time and energy from what's truly important. His plan for pruning is anything but random and He works in every life uniquely. What He judges wasteful for me might be necessary for you.

Pruning is how Father changes the picture of your life from a basket that is almost empty to a basket that's starting to fill.

Have you ever had a time in your life where it seemed like it was just one thing after another coming against you? And you wondered what was going on? Was there an open door to the enemy maybe? Pruning and an open door to the enemy- sometimes it's hard to distinguish which one it is. So we need to ask the Holy Spirit which one it is and He will tell us. If it's an open door we need to find out what it is, repent and close the door. But if it is pruning we need to ask the Holy Spirit to show us clearly what He wants us to let go of and trust Him enough to release it completely to Him.

The most fruitful and joy-filled Christians are the most pruned Christians. The Vinedresser's prune their vineyards more intensely as the vine ages. This is the reason: the vines ability to produce growth increases each year, but without intensive pruning the plant weakens and its crop diminishes. Mature branches must be pruned hard to achieve maximum yields. While early pruning is mostly about your outward activities and priorities, mature pruning is about your values and personal identity. Father moves in close for more intensive pruning because now you are ready to really produce.

In mature pruning the pruning will intensify as Fathers shears cut closer to the core of who you are. Father isn't trying to just take away. He's faithfully at work to make room to add strength, productivity, and spiritual power in your life. His goal is to bring you closer to the perfect and complete image of Christ.

A season is coming, when you will know that you are no longer under Fathers shears. Everywhere you look you'll see amazing evidence of personal transformation and expanded ministry for Him.

You are not called to be comfortable you are called to be fruitful. I am your loving Father and The Gardener of your life, therefore My pruning will prepare you for a beautiful life that will be remembered by all who watched you live surrendered to me. His Treasures-Sheri Shepherd

Next week we will talk about Basket Four-Much fruit. This is what we are striving for.

#### **PART IV**

Let's recap the first three baskets:

Basket one, No fruit

Basket two, Some fruit

Basket three, More fruit

Tonight I'm going to talk about the Fourth Basket and that is much fruit-abiding. This is the level we are striving for.

Abiding means to obey, follow, conform to, act in accordance with, live or dwell with.

## John 15:4-5

If we are not abiding, we wither and die and become of no spiritual use. Look at the promise for the branch that does abide if we stay connected to Him. If we allow the power that flows through Him to flow through us, nothing will hold us back from reaching the most abundant life possible. To abide means to remain, to stay closely connected, to settle in for the long term. Our ongoing vital connection with Him will directly determine the amount of His supernatural power at work in our lives.

In the season of pruning the Vinedresser is proactive. He is pursuing us. He initiates our role is to respond. But, with abiding, we see a 180 degree turn in who initiates the movement toward fruitfulness at the highest level. To abide we must act.

Abiding is all about the most important friendship of your life. Abiding doesn't measure how much you know about your faith or your Bible. In abiding, you seek, long for, thirst for, wait for, see, know, love, hear and respond to a Person, which is God, and He is three persons in one. The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

## 1 John 5:7 KJB

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word (Jesus) and the Holy Ghost and these three are one.

More abiding means more of Him in your activities, thoughts and desires. We often rush to do and perform for God, we don't just sit and enjoy His company. He wants to abide with us more than we want to abide with Him.

## John 15:9

As the Father loved me, I also have loved you, abide in my love which means stay, luxuriate, find real love "in my love"!

If we really abided in His love, we would come away feeling so nourished, so cherished, so loved that we would rush back to Him whenever we could.

Abiding begins with visible spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading and prayer. But we can do these things for years without abiding. After all, reading a book about a person isn't the same thing as knowing the person

who wrote the book. The challenge in abiding is always to break through from dutiful activities to a living flourishing relationship with God.

Here are two principles of abiding:

1. To break through to abiding we must deepen the quality of our devoted time with God. Devoted- loyal, faithful, constant, committed, dedicated.

We need to set sometime aside for Him. Set apart the kind of time that will build a relationship, set aside a time and a private place where you can read, study and talk to the Lord out loud.

Savor Gods words to you, and when you read your Bible receive and savor it like food, like a treasure, like a love letter from the Lord to you. Ponder what you have read and apply it to your daily life. Let it get down into the core of your being and as you read listen to what He wants to say to you.

Talk and listen Him. So often when we pray we treat God like He's some mystical force" out there". But God wants you to talk to Him like you would a friend. Take time to be still before Him.

2. To breakthrough to abiding we must broaden our devoted time, taking it from a morning meeting to an all-day attentiveness to His presence. Too many people leave God in the study or beside their favorite chair and go about their day without Him. We need to talk to Him throughout the day.

#### The Benefits of Abiding:

Abiding helps us to sense the leading of the Holy Spirit. We will recognize His voice and become familiar with His ways.

Abiding helps us to accomplish more for Him because we are more in tune with His directions or instructions for our lives.

Abiding helps us to tap into all of Gods spiritual riches. The disciples learned this principle and it was evident as they healed and preached in

#### **Acts 4:13**

**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.**

When we abide we are " with Jesus" and are filled with His power.

Abiding gives us the rest we need to bear a much greater harvest. When we spend intimate time with our Lord we are strengthened and refreshed to do His work.

Abiding carries with it a promise of answered prayers John 5:7-8  
Nothing please God more than when we ask for what He wants to give.  
When we spend time with Him and allow His priorities, passions and purposes to motivate us we will ask for the things that are closets to His heart.

So let's strive for much fruit in our lives so people can see Jesus in us.