

## PLANTED TO PRODUCE FRUIT

A young man wanted to become a missionary. He was told to come to the missionary examiner's home at 5:00 AM. So the next morning, with snow on the ground, the young man showed up at the home at 5:00 and rang the bell at a missionary examiner's home. Ushered into the office, he sat three hours past his appointment time waiting for his interview. At 8:00 A.M., a retired missionary appeared and began his questioning. "Can you spell?" Rather mystified, the candidate answered, "Yes, sir." "All right. Spell 'baker.'" "B-A-K-E-R." "Fine. Now, do you know anything about numbers?" the examiner continued. "Yes, sir, something." "Please add two plus two." "Four," replied the candidate. "That's fine," said the examiner. "Well, I believe you have passed. I'll tell the board tomorrow."

At the board meeting, the examiner reported on the interview. "He has all the qualifications for a fine missionary. First, I tested him on self-denial, making him arrive at my home at five in the morning. He left a warm bed on a snowy morning without any complaint. Second, I tested him on promptness. He arrived on time. Third, I examined him on patience. I made him wait three hours to see me. Fourth, I tested him on temper. He failed to show any anger or aggravation. Fifth, I tried his humility by asking him questions that a seven-year-old child could answer, and he showed no indignation. So you see, I believe the candidate meets the requirements. He will make the fine missionary we need." Spirit-given abilities are needed, but Spirit-produced fruit is more significant.

Luke 13:6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Today we are continuing in our series Live It Loud. Today I want to talk about the importance of bearing spiritual fruit. That means that people see Jesus in your life. They see the difference.

### 1. Our PURPOSE - planted to produce fruit

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed (planted) you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.

The characters in this parable are clear. The owner is God, the caretaker is Christ and the fig tree, from the context of the passage, is the nation of Israel. The owner expected to see figs on His tree, and had been looking for them to come for quite some time. The caretaker intercedes for the tree and works hard to try to get it to produce fruit. God had chosen Israel to be a light to the rest of the world. He expected Israel to reflect His love and character.

Isaiah 42:6 I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.

Isaiah 49:6 It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Here we see that time was running out for Israel. God was about to uproot it as His chosen people. Today we as the church are called to show God's love. We are called to bear fruit.

Grape vines are planted to bear grapes. A fig tree planted in a vineyard is expected to grow figs. A vineyard is a special place which has been prepared and is designed specifically for growing plants. It has rich soil, fertilizer, sunlight and caretakers to remove weeds and make sure that there is plenty of water. Plants grown in these ideal surroundings are expected to produce fruit.

I once read of a little boy who used to escape his bedroom after being punished. He would crawl out of his bedroom window down an old fruit tree to the ground. One day, he overheard his father telling a neighbour that he was going to chop down the fruit tree, because it hadn't borne any fruit for a number of years. That evening, the boy and his friend bought a bushel of apples, and during the night, tied those apples on the barren branches. The next morning, the man could not believe his eyes. He said to his wife, "Honey, I just can't believe it! That old tree hasn't yielded any fruit for years, and now it's covered with apples. And, the most amazing thing is that it's a pear tree!"

Like the fig tree, God expects us as Christians to grow and to produce fruit. God doesn't expect us to come to Him already perfected. We come to Him as we are and then begin to change and grow into His likeness. Like children, we expect to see growth and development in our lives. What kind of fruit? The indicators of change in our lives are:

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.

## 2. Our PRODUCTIVITY - reasons for not bearing fruit

Healthy plants produce fruit. However, there are factors that decrease a plant's productivity.

### a. It could have been diseased –

Sin is a disease in our lives and robs of us our fruit. When you are sick, your body uses up all its energy fighting the sickness within. A healthy body is one in which there is energy to work. A very tall tree can be brought down by a very small worm. Do you have any worms in your life stopping you from bearing fruit.

A certain man wanted to sell his house. Another man wanted very badly to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door. After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So first the owner went out found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the nail he still owned. Soon the house became unliveable and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail. If we leave the Devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation.

### b. It could have needed pruning –

Perhaps the tree had been using all its energy and resources to grow leaves instead of fruit. In cases like this, pruning is required to remove unnecessary externals to increase fruitfulness. The process of pruning is not an easy one. We can become involved in so many things (good as they are) in our lives that we lose sight of the most important thing - our relationship with Christ.

Sometimes God needs to shake us so hard that only that which is unshakable will remain. Pruning is never an easy thing.

I remember hearing a woman named Helen Roseveare use the example of a rose being turned into an arrow. She held up the rose and slowly pulled off the leaves, petals, thorns, and even the outer layer of the stem, until all she had left was a stick. She said that although these pieces weren't necessarily bad, they had to be removed in order to make an arrow that would fly straight. Helen Roseveare said it's the same way with God. Sometimes he has to remove things from our lives, even good things, in order to make us ready to do his work. Most people want to live their lives as roses. They look nice and smell sweet. Everyone likes roses. The problem is that roses are not useful as weapons. In God's hands the flower is removed, the stem smoothed until all that remains is an arrow. God is looking for arrows. He is looking for those willing to allow themselves to be stripped until God can use them as weapons for battle.

c. It could have been dead –

Dead trees do not produce fruit. A possible explanation for not bearing spiritual fruit in your life is that you have never given it to Jesus.

In Kuwait we had purchased some new palm trees for the compound. The trees were planted and all seemed to be fine except one. It just looked brown and dry. When the seasons for dates came all the trees had big clusters of dates except that one tree. The one that was not producing fruit was that it had died. It still looked like a palm with brown dry branches but the tree had no life.

The Romans sometimes compelled a captive to be joined face-to-face with a dead body, and to bear it about until the horrible emanating smell destroyed the life of the living victim. Virgil describes this cruel punishment: *The living and the dead at his command were coupled face to face, and hand to hand; Till choked with stench, in loathed embraces tied, The lingering wretches pined away and died.* Without Christ, we are shackled to a dead corpse—our sinfulness. Only repentance frees us from certain death, for life and death cannot coexist indefinitely.

Whatever the case, there had to have been some reason why the tree was not bearing fruit. Often as Christians we are quick to point the finger at everyone else other than ourselves. Many believers will say "how can anyone grow in THIS church" or "if only the pastor would teach this or that then I would grow more". God has planted you in fertile soil. Everything we need for growth and vitality is around us. It is our job to do what we need to do to grow.

3. Our PRODUCE - by our fruit we will be known

The nation of Israel was given a warning – but they chose to ignore it. Because of this they were “uprooted” as His chosen people. The warning is the same which is given to us today. If we refuse to bear fruit in our lives then God will not use us as His witnesses in the world.

Matt 7:17 Every good tree bears good fruit , but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit . 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.

It is not our job to make the fruit. Only God can do this in our lives. It is not our power but our proximity that matters. Our job as Christians is to remain in the vine. As we seek Christ and His kingdom He will, through the Holy Spirit, produce change in us.

A machine in a factory works and turns out a product, but it could never manufacture "fruit." Fruit must grow out of life, and, in the case of the believer, it is the life of the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). When you think of "works," you think of effort, labor, strain, and toil; when you think of "fruit," you think of beauty, quietness, the unfolding of life. The flesh produces "dead works" (Heb. 9:14), but the Spirit produces living fruit. Fruit has in it the seed for still more fruit (Gen. 1:11).

A few years ago, the Associated Press released a study done by an agricultural school in Iowa. It reported that production of 100 bushels of corn from one acre of land, in addition to the many hours of the farmer's labor, required 4,000,000 pounds of water, 6,800 pounds of oxygen, 5,200 pounds of carbon, 160 pounds of nitrogen, 125 pounds of potassium, 75 pounds of yellow sulphur, and other elements too numerous to list. In addition to these things, which no man can produce, rain and sunshine at the right time are critical. It was estimated that only 5 percent of the produce of a farm can be attributed to the efforts of man. If we were honest, we'd have to admit that the same is true in producing spiritual fruit.

We see in this parable that the owner will not put up with lack of fruit forever. There will be a time when the owner will act and remove the tree from the garden. This is clearly seen in God's approach to the nation of Israel. It is also applicable to us. Sometimes we may think that because we go to church or were born into a Christian home we are safe in the vineyard. Watch out:

Luke 3:8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' ... 9 The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

The story is told of a lighthouse keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline and who received his new supply of oil once a month to keep the light burning. Not being far from shore, he had frequent guests. One night a woman from the village begged some oil to keep her family warm. Another time a father asked for some to use in his lamp. Another needed some to lubricate a wheel. Since all the requests seemed legitimate, the lighthouse keeper tried to please everyone and granted them all. Toward the end of the month he noticed that the supply of oil was very low. Soon, it was gone, and the beacon light went out. That night several ships were wrecked and lives were lost. When the authorities investigated, the man was very repentant. To his excuses and pleading their reply was: "You were given the oil for one purpose -- to keep that light burning!"

We were planted to produce fruit. We are blessed to be a blessing. God wants to touch the world through our lives. As people see the positive transformation (fruit) in our lives they will seek the one who can change their lives as well.