

Hanging Out With Jesus: The Secret To Bearing a Lot of Fruit

Unedited Transcript

John 15:1-8

Good morning, men! This really happened; a woman said to me oh you look so skinny! Then she said I just think it's wonderful when senior citizens take care of themselves like that! Oh my gosh! I was really conflicted at that point, because one of my life verses is that he who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the King for his friend. Of course she's not the King so there might be an out on this! I played it back in my mind, and of course I would never say this but it shows how vulgar I am, and what I wanted to say was oh thank you so much and when is the due date?

Our series is called Hanging Out With Jesus. We're going through these Bible stories chronologically, one at a time. We're also going through in most cases each story verse by verse, which is called expository or exegetical teaching, where you're revealing both the message and the meaning of each individual verse. Today will be especially in that direction, but first let's do a shout out. We want to give a shout out to Sugarcreek Baptist Church, a group of men that are meeting there in Houston, TX. Bobby Peralta is the leader, 12 guys meeting on Thursdays nights for about a year now and they're using the Video Bible Study with us. So I wonder if you would join me in giving these men a warm welcome to the Man in the Mirror Bible Study? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us!

Bearing Much Fruit – Who Wouldn't Want That?

The title of the message today is The Secret to Bearing a Lot of Fruit. Who doesn't want to make a contribution? Who doesn't want to make a difference? We all want to make the world a better place, to leave some kind of a mark on it. I thought we'd start with this thing, the idea of bearing much fruit. Who wouldn't want to do that? Look with me at the last verse of our text, John 15:8. Jesus says:

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Who wouldn't want that? Who wouldn't want to bear a lot of fruit? Let's take a look at this passage together, we're going to do all eight verses. We're going to begin by just asking the question what exactly is fruit? Trying to develop a narrow interpretation of a story where Jesus is using an illustration is pretty dangerous, so just beware of Bible teaching that wants to make this a real narrow kind of thing. So this would be possibly the fruit of the spirit. It could be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That would be possible fruit. It could be the fruit of good deeds or works. It could be that God has said the great commandment with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. So it could be the fruit that is loving God. It could be the second commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself; a new command I give to you, that you love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. So it could be the fruit of loving your neighbor and all that that implies. It could be the fruit of taking care of the culture, the cultural mandate, the work that you do. That could be bearing much fruit. In other words, God has gifted you in a particular way, he's called you to a particular field. He's given you this sort of life work to do, and you do it with diligence,

and when you complete your projects, you're bearing much fruit. Or it could be making disciples and the great commission. So I've covered a lot of waterfront here, the fruit of the spirit and the four universal purposes for all men, loving God, loving others, the cultural mandate and the great commission. So it could be making disciples, helping people come to Jesus and grow in their faith, and then serving him in all of their lives.

Jesus says this is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. He means everything! All of your life! You can bear fruit in every single area of your life! What does it mean by much fruit? It doesn't just say bear fruit, it says much fruit! So that would take us to the parable of the soil with the fourth soil, where the seed falls among the good soil is like the man who hears the word and produces a crop or produces fruit. Thirty, sixty, a hundred times what was sown! That's what Jesus Christ wants for you and for me, he wants us to bear much fruit. It's to the Father's glory when we do this, it's how we show that we are his disciples.

Some of you, probably, are already exhausted! Oh my gosh! One more talk about all the things I need to do to make God happy! Man, I thought I was working hard, and now I've got to double my efforts because I'm only doing fifteen times what was sown! Just to get to the low end of the rung, I've got to do thirty times? I've got to man up, I've got to double down here! And some of you are already exhausted by this message. So we have a problem. What I would like you to do is just look back over the last ten years of your life and think about the fruit that you have been able to produce or bear. Think about all of the phone calls, all of the appointments, all of the presentations, all of the relationships that you've invested in. All the time you've spent on your sports and your recreation. All of the time you spent on your different roles, as a husband, a father, a worker, a church man, etc. When you look back over this last decade, are you happy with the fruit that you've produced? We have a problem, because when most of us look back, we realize that we've wasted a lot of energy, and we've had a lot of stops and starts. In other words, we come to a men's meeting or church service, we get all amped up, jacked up, ready to go, and we charge out to do these good works, we know that these good works need to be done, we know we need to produce fruit. So we get all amped up, we go out and excel! Until Tuesday, when the other duties and responsibilities of our lives begin to close back in on us and the enthusiasm of Sunday becomes this distant memory.

When I prepare one of these messages, I have this worksheet for it. One of the things I'm looking for in it is what is the truth that stirs me so deeply that I feel compelled to tell my men about it immediately! When I'm looking at a text, I'm saying what is the truth in this text that stirs me up, gets me amped and ready to go? But then I have another question I ask; what one thing if fully understood and believed would change everything? I think we have in this text, in a very special way, there is a truth here that can release you to bear fruit on a sustained basis. There's a truth here in this text that can equip and empower you to get all revved up about doing good things for God, about doing good things for Jesus, going out and never getting tired of doing it! Would you like to know what that truth is? That truth, the thing that really is obvious in the text we're going to look at is that the key to bearing much fruit is not bearing much fruit. The key to bearing much fruit is to remain in Jesus. Look with me at verse 4. Jesus says:

⁴Remain in me and I will remain in you...

Verse 5, second sentence:

⁵If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Verse 7:

⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.

Now this word remain in some of your translations is the word abide, meno. It's to continue, to dwell in, it's everything, abiding in Jesus. Jesus says abide in me, and I will do these three things: I will abide in you, you will bear much fruit, and I will answer your prayers. Who among us wouldn't love to have those three things, to sense the presence of Jesus in our lives abiding in us? Who wouldn't like to experience this bearing much fruit on an ongoing basis? And who wouldn't want to have their prayers answered? Three incredible promises by simply doing one thing, abiding in Jesus!

It's three-for. It's Christ in me, it's Christ through me, and it's Christ for me. It's Christ in me, he abides in me; it's Christ through me, I bear much fruit; it's Christ for me, he answers my prayers. This is unbelievable! So the Big Idea today is this: **Bearing a lot of fruit is easily sustainable by abiding in Christ.** Even past Tuesday! That's the deal! To bear much fruit, don't focus on bearing much fruit! Focus on remaining in Jesus Christ.

How Abiding in Christ is the Key to Bearing Much Fruit

So how is abiding in Christ the key to bearing much fruit? Let's just start at verse 1 and work our way down:

The Vine and the Branches

¹⁵ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

I have a butterfly garden. I have always had an interest in this, and in the last couple of years I've been building up this butterfly garden on our back patio. I've decided to do this as a container garden, and I've got all these beautiful plants out there. So you can see here these yellow ones are the lantana for those of you who know, and there's the pentas, and a lot of other plants you can't see here. But it's beautiful! Yet, every now and then I have a plant go bad on me. I bought a phlox which is supposed to attract butterflies. I guess it does somewhere, but not in my back yard! I just replaced it this last week with a cone flower. The reason that I was eager to replace the plant is for what I was looking for, it wasn't bearing any fruit! It wasn't serving the purpose for which it was created, and so I threw it away. I remember also, one of the reasons these plants look real full is that I trim them back regularly. Anybody who has ever had lantana knows it is basically a big weed. It grows like one, and so I have to trim this back every six weeks or so because it just grows, but every time I trim it back it gets more beautiful the next time and more compact.

My mom had a ligustrum hedge at our first house when I was in elementary school. It was the scrawniest hedge you've ever seen in your life! But, I decided that I wanted to earn some extra money, so I sprigged ligustrums in old tin pots and sold them. I basically started a nursery. So I started clipping the ligustrum trees and all of a sudden her bushes started looking healthy and robust, because as I trimmed them clean, they did what it says in in this verse, every branch that does not bear fruit he trims clean, so that it will be even more fruitful. That's exactly what was happening! In this particular text, this issue of mystery, let's look at verse 3 again. Jesus says you are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Before that he said, if you produce fruit, you're going to get cut, if you don't produce fruit, you're going to get cut off. Whether you're in Christ or not doesn't make a difference, you're going to get cut. Good to know. Now, I'm not 100% sure what I'm about to tell you, but I think he's giving an illustration here. Then he's giving the disciples the assurance of their salvation. In other words, he's saying they have eternal security in verse 3 here. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Isaiah 55:11, my word which goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and the purpose for which I have sent it. Hebrews 4:12, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare. The power of God's word is what has penetrated our lives, judged our thoughts and attitudes and drawn us to Jesus and made us clean.

We've already talked about the idea of these three promises. Remain in me and I remain in you; remain in me and you will bear much fruit; remain in me and I will answer your prayers. The key here, what's obvious is that abiding in Christ is what leads to all the things that we want, that all of us want! All of us want to have this deeper relationship with Jesus, all of us want to lead fruitful lives, all of us want to have our prayers answered and the key to each of these things is to abide in Jesus. I debated going into all the details of the analogy of the vine and the branches. I decided against it, it's pretty obvious, but one thing that is interesting to make note of is that when the branch is attached to the vine, it produces fruit naturally. When you and I are connected to Jesus, the vine, you're going to be producing fruit naturally, just out of the overflow of your relationship with him.

What happens to the man, then, who does not abide in Christ? We each and every one of us know what happens, because we have been that man! You know what happens! You lose your first love, you become luke warm, you begin to exchange the truth of God for lies, you exchange the glory of God for an idol, you begin to run in the race. Galatians 5, maybe 7, you were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? Paul answers his own question, he says here's the problem: the problem is a little bit of yeast works its way through the whole batch of dough. So we don't abide in Christ, then the yeast of culture works its way through. Either the Gospel works its way through our lives because we abide in Jesus, or the yeast of culture does, and you can't have it both ways. Of course, you know that. But as you become worldly, you become a cultural Christian. Sin crouches at your door, ready to defeat you. You become self-absorbed, self-pity sets in. You hear a message about serving God and what happens? You groan, you grumble, and the reason is because you don't have enough Jesus for yourself, much less any left over to give to anyone else. I remember in my early days as a follower of Jesus, I was sitting around, self-absorbed, luke warm, having a pity party, and my wife says you know what your problem is? I think this is going to be good... She said your problem is that you're entirely focused on yourself. You need to get out of this house and you need to do something for somebody else. Get your eyes off yourself and stop this self-pity! I'm thinking wow, she really has a gift of encouragement... but I knew she was right! So I did, I went down to a local youth ministry and said hey,

what can I do to help around here. It was interesting, because I was just given some menial task but, BAM! Just like that! The spirit of self-pity and depressive thoughts I had lifted as I began to give myself away to other people. It's interesting, because I said you don't bear much fruit by trying to bear much fruit. But it is interesting that you can get to abiding in Christ by going out there and doing something to serve him. That's a little bit of an irony, don't you think? I don't serve because I don't have enough Jesus, but I go and serve and I feel like I get more Jesus out of that. That's just the way some of you are wired. Some of you get your sense of the majesty of God by looking at the stars at night or going hiking in the mountains. But others of you, you feel the presence of God most when you're pounding nails, or helping some widow fix her refrigerator. That makes you feel the presence of God that helps you to abide in Christ. You need to be released to do that, and that's okay. It's not only okay, it's fantastic! The Big Idea today is this: **Bearing a lot of fruit is easily sustainable by abiding in Christ.** So make abiding in Christ the object, the goal.

How Does Abiding Work?

Let's talk about how to do some of that. How does abiding work? First of all, remember this: abiding in Christ is all about Christ, okay? It's all about Jesus. The Christian life is Jesus, it's all about Jesus. Abiding in him and bearing much fruit for him and then getting our prayers answered through him. It's all about Jesus, that is the starting point.

Second, without it sounding like works for righteousness, you have to make Jesus a priority. You just have to make him a priority, something to which we assign a degree or sense of urgency. I was on a phone conference yesterday with six leaders from all around the country, and they were all pastors except me. One of them said something interesting. He said the men in my church just don't have time to read the word on a regular basis. My men can't read through the Bible in a year. I get what he's saying, he's talking about how they have busy responsibilities, and they've got kids and all that. There's nothing in the Bible that says you have to read through the Bible once a year. So suggestions that are best practices must never be imposed upon people as though it were the will of God that you read the Bible through cover to cover once a year. Is it a good idea? Absolutely! Will it change your life? Absolutely! Do you have to do it for any spiritual reason? Absolutely not! But, I'm just saying, that if you want to abide in Jesus, you're going to have to put some time in to it. You're going to have to make Jesus a priority in your life. So what I would say to somebody who says I don't have enough time to read the Bible is let's get out your calendar and take a look! Because you're going to need to find some time for this! What? Are you sleeping 12 hours a night? What's going on here? Make abiding in him a priority, it's going to take some time. We make a priority of abiding in Jesus by hanging out with Jesus! That's the title of our series! When you're here, this is you abiding in him! Right here, right now! This is abiding!

Another way to make Jesus the priority that I know you want him to be is to start each day by coming humbly to the foot of the cross. Once again, make a full, total, complete surrender of your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and do so every day! That will help you make Jesus a priority.

Spiritual disciplines. Bad word in our generation, disciplines. Nobody likes being told what to do, especially now. There were generations before us where it was a virtue to have somebody tell you to be disciplined. But you tell somebody they need to practice the disciplines today and they'll say you can't tell me what to do! Or at least they think it! You know how I know that people think you can't tell me what to do? Because that's the way I respond when somebody tells me I need to do this or that! You need to consider this or that! It would be wise, though it's not required in the Bible, but it would be wise

to practice all of the spiritual disciplines, to figure out what they are. But there are two that will be immensely helpful to you.

A guy came up to me after one of my messages and he was depressed and discouraged. We got to talking, his business was upside down and his marriage was upside down. I said I am so sorry, and I listened for about fifteen minutes as he unfolded this story. I said could I ask you a couple of questions? He said sure. He told me he was looking for advice, but really he was looking for counsel. I asked him to tell me about his devotional life and his Bible reading. His chin dropped to his chest. He mumbled to be honest with you I really haven't been reading my Bible very much lately. I said okay, I understand. Let me ask you a second question, who is your best friend or do you have a small group you get together with on a regular basis, some guys you're doing life with? And a second time his chin fell to his chest and he mumbled to be honest with you, I've kind of withdrawn from other people. The first commandment is to do what? Love God. The second commandment is to do what? Love one another. So if you were the devil and the first and second most important things to do were to love God and other people, where would you focus your energy if you were the devil? You would focus your energy on getting people to stop loving God and to stop loving one another! What better way to is there to get people to stop loving God than to separate them from the word of God? What better way is there to get people to stop loving others than to get them depressed and withdrawn into isolation?

There a lots of spiritual disciplines, but I adjure you, read the word of God. Blessed is the man who does not stand in the counsel of the wicked, sit in the seat of mockers, or walk in the way of sinners. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on it he meditates both day and night. He will be like a tree planted by streams of water which yields his crop in season, and everything he does will be successful. That's the word! Then being with other guys, doing life on life together. These are two powerful ways to help you abide in Jesus. And if you want to bear much fruit, it's easily sustainable when you do this thing, abiding in Jesus. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our Father, our God, our dearest Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Lord, each and every one of us want to lead a significant life of contribution and impact and making a difference. We want it to matter that we've walked across the face of this planet. We do want to bear much fruit, and so Lord, you have given us the key to bearing a lot of fruit and it's not throwing ourselves into it, Lord, but it's leaning into you, abiding in you. So I pray that you would help each of us to have the joy of bearing much fruit that comes out of the overflow of our relationship with you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen!