

STRAIGHT TALK: The Fruitful vs. the Frustrated Life

In John 15:16 Jesus says, "I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last," (NIV). In fact, the Bible has a lot to say about how Christians bear fruit—and there are two ways that we can do it. One is by displaying the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). And the second way is by getting out in the world where God has planted us and being good to people.

I'm talking about helping people who are hard to love or don't seem to deserve it. Or giving to the poor and getting involved with people so you can make a difference and help make their lives better, rather than spending all of your time trying to make yourself happy.

I've discovered that being selfish and self-centered never makes anyone happy.

Living for God is really just the opposite of that. God does want to bless us and give us the things we need, but when we give our lives to Him, our purpose is to serve Him.

In Matthew 12:33 (NIV) Jesus says, "...The tree is recognized by its fruit." And this is how people know who we are. Just as you recognize an orange tree by the oranges it produces, you know a Christian by the fruit of their lifestyle.

I've said often that you won't be recognized as a Christian just because you have a Christian bumper sticker on your car or you wear Christian jewelry or go to church every week. Most of the time people won't care what you have to say if your behavior doesn't back it up.

The fruit of our lives is seen in our behavior—what we do to

help others and our attitudes—as well as what we say. It's the visible expression of the invisible work that God is doing in us.

Jesus says in John 15:8 (AMP), "My Father is glorified and honored by this, when you bear much fruit, and prove yourselves to be My [true] disciples." In other words, we're not proving anything to anyone simply by what we say. It's the fruit of our lives that proves who we really are.

So it's good for us to frequently ask ourselves: Who am I helping in my life? How am I making a difference or making someone else's life better?

The key to bearing good fruit is found in John 15:5 (AMP), which says, "I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him bears much fruit, for [otherwise] apart from Me [that is, cut off from vital union from Me] you can do nothing."

Jesus is telling us that as we spend time with Him in prayer and by studying the Bible, His Spirit is working in us, changing us little by little (2 Cor. 3:18), causing us to reflect His image or characteristics more and more. It's a progressive transformation that takes time and requires a consistent commitment throughout our lifetime.

If you aren't spending regular time with Jesus and growing in your relationship with Him through prayer and Bible study, I want to challenge you to reevaluate your priorities and put first things first. The truth is we put our time into what we really want to do. And if something is truly important to you, you will find time to do it.

God created you because He loves you, He wants to have a personal relationship with you, and He wants to do amazing things *in you* and *through you*. Every day is a gift from God and it's so precious!

Ephesians 3:20 (AMP) says that God “is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us.” He has a plan for you and He will give you everything you need to fulfill your destiny as you seek Him and grow stronger in your faith in Him.

As Pentecost shows, the power of the blood of Jesus purchased for us on the cross offers us God’s wonder working power for all time, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me,” (2 Cor. 12:9, MEV).

I want to encourage you to focus on Jesus and live by the wisdom He reveals to you in His Word. If you choose today to help someone else, not only will you be happier, but you’ll find that good fruit brings true satisfaction and fulfillment.

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