

Invest Your Life for God's Glory

As a wife/mom/author/teacher who loves Jesus and wants to minister in His name, I often think about the phrase from John 15, "fruit that remains."

"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you" (John 15:16, NASB).

I don't want to waste my time with my family, students or readers, and I long for the investments that I make at home or with others to have long-term value.

Years ago, mostly before kids, I had the chance to speak at several retreats with 300-400 attendees. It was heady, and I was blessed in those ministry settings. Family responsibilities have kept me from accepting opportunities to speak at something that large the last two years, yet the opportunities I have had to sit and talk one-on-one have grown (certainly with my boys in my home, but also with women in our community).

As I evaluate this season of slow-and-steady opportunities to sow seeds at home or church, I think often of the tortoise and the hare. It is one of my favorite fables, probably because the truths it reflects are, first, scriptural and, second, very practical.

If you are a person who likes public ministry like me, think on Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare, and ask yourself what finish line is in your head. For me, I have what I believe is a genuine desire to help other women, especially younger women, in areas that I struggled. I remember sweetly the times older women invested in me. I remember the moments

of teaching or conversation in which the light came on in my head as the Spirit applied the Scripture or wisdom they shared with me. I want to invest similarly in my home and church. And I want those investments to result in fruit that Satan cannot snatch away. That's the finish line in my head when I think practically about the fable of the tortoise and the hare.

After 20 years or so in various forms of Christian ministry with some big opportunities and many more small ones, I can say with heartfelt conviction that the most influential parts of ministry for me are the quiet one-on-one conversations over time. This is not to minimize the big moments. We can likely all remember being seriously influenced by a public speaker or author. And yet I am firmly convinced it is the private conversations at my neighborhood hole-in-the-wall Ethiopian restaurant or the local playground that are my most serious investments in ministry.

Key to understanding these investments is remembering how the Bible uses the word *fruit*. What abiding fruit is Jesus talking about in John 15? Is He talking about numbers of people who profess faith in Him that then persevere in that faith? He's not, I think, talking simply about the number of people who start attending church who persevere in faith long-term.

His words are best understood with Paul's clarification on fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit that I just quoted is relevant because Jesus' instructions on fruit that remains in John 15 is in the context of life after the Holy Spirit comes. Consider Jesus' words in the previous chapter:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with

you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-18, ESV).

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:25-26)

Consider the progression of Jesus' discussion with His disciples. In John 14, Jesus speaks of the Spirit. In chapter 15, He speaks of fruit that remains. Then, in John 16, He reinforces His words about the Holy Spirit:

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:7-8).

Jesus is giving His disciples final instructions before His arrest, with a view toward abiding fruit in ministry. The Holy Spirit is the primary Helper in this next phase of ministry. But what does the abiding fruit of ministry look like? It's not so much growth in numbers. It's growth in character.

Sure, it involves multiple people; numbers of people are not irrelevant! But the point of, say, Pentecost is not just that 3,000 people expressed faith, but that 3,000 people began a journey toward real fruit that remains—transformation in love, joy, peace, endurance and strength under control in the image of God. Thousands of people came forward that day, but that wasn't the ultimate fruitful goal.

It was their transformation into God's image—the long-term work of discipleship and growth. That's the fruit that

remains. Big events can give a jump-start to fruit that remains. They can identify people who are thirsty, and they can equip people with basic tools to further their journey of growth. But they are not, in and of themselves, the fruit that remains.

As women after God's heart who long to minister in His name, I encourage you to be watchful for the individual woman who longs for someone to speak grace and truth into her life. Take her to coffee and listen to her heart. Ask follow-up questions, and point her to the God who has worked in your life. And please do not let women who seem to have big public ministries weigh you down or cause you to undervalue the power of one-on-one conversation.

Women have disciplined me privately, and their investment over coffee or lunch has ministered great grace to me, drawing me toward greater love, peace and gentleness in the Lord. And I now, in turn, invest as well, believing deeply in this work of ministry—over coffee, over a meal or at a playground while corralling little ones. These small moments of sowing seeds are powerful long-term as God brings lasting fruit in His name.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*