

The following series of daily readings and questions has been designed by Pastor Tom Cullen to lead up to the sermon for the coming week. There are five daily studies for each week. Allow about 20 minutes a day to complete each daily devotional.

The weekly sermons can be listened too at sbc.com

Each week's daily devotional guide is also available online at sbc.com under the small group tab.

Reflection and Prayer:

"If you profess to be a Christian worker, stop for a moment. Ask yourself, Am I leaving a mark for eternity on those around me? My dear sister or brother, it is not your preaching or teaching, your strength of will or power to influence that will make a difference. All depends on having your life full of God and his power. And again, that depends on your living the truly branchlike life of abiding, a life of close and unbroken fellowship with Christ. It is the branch who abides in him that brings forth much fruit, fruit that abides." ⁶

How would you describe the eternal impact the Lord is making through your life on those he has placed around you? Check one:

- a. He is changing people's lives by His work through me.
- b. The impact He is making through me is small.
- c. I don't see Him working through me to impact those around me.
- d. Other _____ ⁷

Pray: Write out your prayer to God.

Friday February 3

Week 4: Bearing much fruit

Pray: Dear God, renew my Spirit and draw me close to you. May I not serve You today as a teenager begrudgingly cleans up their bedroom. May I serve You with cheerfulness and joy, knowing that I serve the living King. Meet me today in my study, in my work and in my leisure that I may know Your goodness.

Read: John 15:9-16

Focus: Fruit that abides

1. Why did Jesus choose us? (John 15:16)

2. We all know that there is some fruit that does not last - it has to be eaten right away. There is other fruit that will last a whole season if it is kept properly. Do you think there is fruit in the Christian life which does not last? Describe it. Why won't it last? Do you think there is fruit in the Christian life which does last? Describe it. Why will it last?

3. One of the ways to identify a tree is to look at its fruit. What then is the secret of bearing fruit that abides?

Living the Fruitful Life – A Study of John 15

As a gardener I enjoy all the seasons. But one of my favourites is harvest season. For me, this begins in late August when my tomato plants finely bear fruit. I say "finely" because it's a long process. First I carefully choose my plants from the local garden centre. Then, I tenderly plant them in the rich, warm soil, water them and stake them. As they grow through the summer months I prune them so that all the energy of the plant can go to producing large tomatoes. I watch over them and tie their branches to the stakes to keep the forming fruit from wallowing in the dirt. Finally they produce beautiful red fruit. What a joy there is in picking tomatoes! There is the satisfaction of seeing my work rewarded. There is the happiness I know they will bring when I take them around to my neighbours as a gift. There is the anticipation of slicing them and putting them on toast with bacon and mayo!

Now imagine for a moment how I would feel if my tomato plants did not bear fruit. What a disappointment! All that attention, all that work, would be wasted. And I ask you, if a tomato plant doesn't bear tomatoes, what good is it? I don't plant tomatoes for their pretty flowers because their flowers are small and hardly noticeable. I don't plant tomatoes for their pretty colourful leaves because they don't have any! I don't plant tomatoes for medicinal purposes. I don't plant tomatoes for the good of the air. I plant tomatoes for one reason and one reason alone – so that they may bear fruit!

So we come to our study this week and think about Jesus' words to us "branches". And we discover that we Christians have one purpose and one purpose alone – to bear fruit. That's different than what we sometimes think. We think that the most important thing is to be saved, to be born again. We sometimes think that if we are saved, we have arrived. But the truth is, being saved is subordinate to bearing fruit. Jesus Christ did not die and rise again so that we can go to heaven, as wonderful as that is. No, He died and rose again so that we can bear fruit that is pleasing to our heavenly Father.

As we continue in our study, we will review the whole idea of fruitbearing, then we will think of what it looks like. What is this fruit that we are supposed to bear? How can we bear as much of it as possible?

As we launch out this week, may we pray that we will not be like useless tomato plants that bear no fruit. May we instead be like

those tomato plants that grow healthy and strong and bear a rich harvest for the gardener, our Heavenly Father.

Monday January 30

Bearing fruit

Pray: Dear God - God of grace and mercy. Thank you for Your infinite patience with me. Forgive me, Lord, for my dull spirit. Forgive me for being slow to hear and slower to respond to Your voice. Help me, Lord, to recognize Your grace in my life and to respond with faith and obedience.

Read: John 15:1-6; Luke 13:1-9

Focus: Demonstrating Christ

1. In Luke 13:6-9 Jesus tells a parable. Its theme comes out of the previous five verses – the need to repent and follow Jesus Christ. What did the man look for from the fig tree?

2. Why is the man upset with the fig tree?

Reflection and Prayer:

Hear the truth of today's passage regarding the ability to bear much fruit; "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit."

Andrew Murray writes:

"A gardener cares for one thing – the strength and healthy life of his tree. The fruit follows of itself. If you would bear fruit, see that the inner life is perfectly right, that your relation to Christ

Jesus is clear and close. Begin each day with him in the morning to know in truth that you are abiding in him and he in you. Nothing less will do. It is not your willing and running, it is not by your might or strength, but – " 'by My Spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). Meet each new opportunity, undertake every new work, with an ear and heart open to the Master's voice: 'He who abides in me ... bears much fruit.' Tend to the abiding; he will see to the fruit. He will give it in you and through you.

"O my brother and sister, Christ must do all! The vine provides the sap and the life, and the strength; the branch waits, rests, receives, and bears the fruit. Oh, the blessedness of being only branches, through whom the Spirit flows and brings God's life to his people.

I plead with you, take time and ask the Holy Spirit to help you realize the unspeakable solemn place you occupy in the mind of God. He has planted you into his Son with the calling and the power to bear much fruit. Accept that place. Look much to God and his dear Son and joyfully expect to be what God has planned to make you, a fruitful branch."⁵

Pray: Spend some time basking in the love of Christ for you.

Pray: Dear God: Thank you for promising to bear fruit in me. Thank you that You do not allow me to be what I once was. You continually seek to transform me into the image of Your Son. Thank you for Your wonderful grace toward me.

Read: John 15:5; Galatians 5:16-26

Focus: Bearing much fruit

1. Throughout the John 15 passage, Jesus has spoken of fruit (verse 2a), then more fruit (verse 2b), and now much fruit (verse 5). Take note of the possibility for a great harvest! Think of a fruitbearing vine – what words would you use to describe the process of fruitbearing?

striving effort natural other spontaneous silent restful compelled labour work a product of relationship a product of separation

2. Think of the words you have used to describe fruitbearing. How would can these be applied to the Christian life and bearing fruit for God?

3. Below is the list of the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23. Circle two fruit that you would like God's Spirit to grow in your life more fully.

love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self-control

3. In verse 8 we have a word of grace. How is the reply like Christ's care for us?

4. Will a fruitless tree be endured forever? (verse 9)

5. In John 15 who gets the fruit?

- A. the branch
B. the vine
C. the gardener

6. Which of the following statements best describes your life? Check one

- A. I live mostly for myself and what I want to accomplish.
B. I seek to live for Christ only when it is convenient for me.
C. I want Christ to accomplish His purpose through me each day.
D. Other _____ 1

Pray: Dear God: Help me to understand how I am to be a branch. Help me to know what this fruit looks like.

Read: Philippians 1:9-11; Ephesians 5:8-20

Focus: Thinking about the nature of the fruit

1. Look up the following passages and list the qualities of fruit that are mentioned:

Ephesians 5:8-12

Galatians 5:22-23

Isaiah 37:17

2. Philippians 1:11 speaks of the fruit of righteousness. What do you think this is? (see verse 10)

3. How does the fruit of righteousness come to us? (see Philippians 3:11) How is this thinking similar to the teaching in John 15?

Tuesday January 31

Pray: Dear God, help me to look at myself honestly. I admit that I am much quicker to see the faults of others than my own. I admit that I am quick to criticize others while excusing my own failings. Lord, may I look at myself honestly today and know Your great grace.

Read: John 15:5-8; 2 Corinthians 13:5-10

Focus: 2 Corinthians 13:5

1. We have seen again and again how Jesus exhorts us to bear fruit in John 15. We have to ask ourselves, what does this fruit look like? Andrew Murray suggests that this fruit is for the salvation of people. Do you agree? What do you think the fruit is?

2. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Scripture tells us to examine what to see if we are in the faith?

- A. our Bibles
- B. others
- C. our attendance at worship
- D. ourselves
- E. other _____

3. Given 2 Corinthians 13:5 what should we see evidence of in our lives?

4. Look up the following verses. What do they all have in common? What do they collectively say to us about true Christianity?

Romans 8:16

1 John 3:24

1 John 4:13

It is clear that one of the marks of being a Christian is presence of the Holy Spirit in us. It has been said that if you are a Christian, you must have the Holy Spirit within you. That is certainly true. But as we look at the above verses it becomes clear that the reverse is probably more true: "It is not being a Christian that gives you the right to have the Holy Spirit; it is having the Holy Spirit within that gives you the right to be a Christian." ²

Reflection and Prayer:

How can we test the Holy Spirit's presence in us? What are the marks of the Holy Spirit's life in us? What is the fruit?

See:

John 15:6

John 15:7

John 15:10

John 15:12

"It is sad that for many in the church of Jesus Christ orthodoxy is measured in terms of believing the truth, rather than in terms of experiencing the truth. I am not calling for an experience-based Christianity. We must be wholly and firmly based on the objective revelation of Scripture, from which we must detract nothing and to which we must add nothing. However, we do need an experientially-expressed Christianity, where the truths of the Bible become translated into experience and are seen to actually work in life.

"When the apostle Paul came to Ephesus on this third missionary journey, he met some people described as being "disciples" and he asked them an interesting question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2) Do not look for a subtle meaning in the question - it was a very straightforward one. He was asking, "Are you Christians?" Had he asked them in that form, they might well have answered positively on the basis of a poor understanding of what it means to be a Christian. But the question he did ask could not be so easily evaded. He did not ask them a doctrinal question, but a question about their personal experience. Was there any evidence that the Holy Spirit had come to live within them? He expected them to know on the basis of their experience." ³

Pray: Think about your life. Is there evidence of the Holy Spirit living in you? Is there fruit? Pray for an answer. Pray about the answer.
