

Is It Working

by Alan Martin

The sermon explores the effectiveness of the church by examining spiritual health, growth, and the importance of community in bearing fruit for God's Kingdom.

Scripture: John 3:5

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the past three years and the growth in understanding of scripture and faith within the congregation. The sermon emphasizes the importance of being effective and productive in our spiritual lives. The speaker references Ephesians 4:11-14, highlighting the need for growth and bearing fruit as a sign of a healthy body. The sermon also focuses on the concept of abiding in Christ, drawing from John 15:2-6 and 8, and encourages the congregation to pray corporately and personally for God to move.

Transcript

Let us be welcome here tonight. We welcome you in our hearts and we receive you, Lord, as the Holy Spirit. And as you reveal to us all that you have, Lord, we pray this in Jesus' holy name.

Amen. And just thinking about tonight, you know, we're starting to get here and I realize that where we left off last, when I was going to the series, I left off right where Saul was king and about to enter David's life and I'm just not ready to jump back in there. I think I will at times, but just as I've been reflecting on what is our need, what's the need of the church, what is the, what instruction, what consideration are the most appropriate for where we're at.

And it's, because I don't want to just do something because I enjoy it. That's great. Well, I'm enjoying it.

And maybe even some are enjoying it. We really need to ask a question whether we're being effective. You know, I need to ask that.

We need to know, is this producing what we're desiring? And so I want to look at that a little bit tonight, but as I begin to think, you know, it's been, I guess we're starting, what, my fourth year and I've seen a tremendous amount of change in the area of understanding the Scriptures. When I first came, some of the men here told me, I think if I remember correctly, said, we don't know anything basically. We don't, well, I don't know anything.

I don't remember if that's the word. But there's, we need someone to teach us the word, the Scripture. We need to become more familiar with the Scripture.

And I think over the last three years that's happened. I begin to see a general understanding of the Scripture and who God is and what faith is, what He asks of us, what it means to have a real faith. I'm encouraged by that.

This is in a way going to be a summary and I'd like your input as we go through it, just to make sure we're on track. And so I'm just, I'm going to invite you just to jump in as you can, but this is going to be more about dealing with this question. How do we know, you know, is it working? Are we being effective? And why is that a critical question? Because we are servants of the Lord, right? And He's not just investing knowledge and His love and grace and mercy into our lives just for, so we can have something to do on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights and a few other times during the week.

He has a desire for us. And we need to ask ourselves if our relationship with one another, if our times together are producing something that we can really know for sure is effective, productive and making a difference in our lives on two levels. Individually, you and I personally, and then corporately in relationships that involve other people.

So these are, I want to cover some general things to look at in answering this question of is it working. And I want to look at it for, ask this question, this may not be the perfect way to ask the question, how do you recognize a healthy body? Isn't that what we are? Corporately, we are a body of believers. We are members of one another.

And I think the Lord makes in the natural His wisdom known. It says the heavens declare His glory and the earth declares His glory. And by studying some of the natural elements of a healthy body, how do we determine a person is healthy? What are the stages a healthy body goes through? Then we can at least measure ourselves both individually, am I a healthy individual spiritually? And then we can ask, are we a healthy body spiritually? And then once we determine that, I think we are going to come to a place to see something that is going to be very helpful for where some of us want to be.

Maybe a lot of us want to be with ministry to our families. Ministry to people in our lives. Because ultimately, if it's working, it's not just going to be working in us.

It's going to produce an effective work in others. So if it's really working in us, it should be working and having a positive effect in others. We'll see that toward the end.

Let's start with, how do we recognize a healthy body? What's the first thing that happens in a healthy body? What's the first thing, how does a body get started? Where does a body begin? From the very beginning, where does a body begin? With conception. It begins with conception. So the first thing that has to be determined is, are you alive? Now what do I mean by that? We really need to ask this question.

What did Jesus say in John chapter 3? What did He tell Nicodemus when Nicodemus came to Him? What was Jesus' question to Nicodemus? Really, before Nicodemus could say much, He came to see Jesus at night. And He told, Rabbi, we know you're a teacher sent from God. Jesus kind of, remember He just kind of jumped out there and made a statement to Nicodemus.

It kind of set Him back a little bit. Do you remember what He told Him? Yeah. Unless you're born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.

So this is a question we really have to see. Has there been a spiritual conception? You know, and we really need to answer this question. Is God interested in having warm bodies sitting in our pews? Or having live spiritual bodies? You know what I'm saying? We need to make sure people are genuinely being born again.

We're not trying to make people religious. We want to make sure there has been spiritual life conceived in them. That's just essential.

Let's look in there. Turn to John chapter 3. It doesn't hurt to see these things, even though we may know them. It does not hurt to look at them again.

John chapter 3. Someone read verses 5 and 7. Jesus answered, I'll tell you the truth. No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to the Spirit.

You should not be surprised by sin. You must be born again. Okay.

So, it's not possible to even see or enter the Kingdom of God unless a person is born again. So, as we relate to one another, we're just to make sure each one and those the Lord would bring in our midst, those that we're concerned about, have actually been born again. And have been made this new person in Christ.

And this is done, look in 1 Peter 1.23. The key to this happening is not only the ministry of the Spirit, but the way Peter says we have been begotten. There's a way to be begotten. Someone read 1 Peter 1.23. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God.

Okay. So, for there to be spiritual conception, we're going to need to make sure, and I hope we are, but we have to just, it does not hurt to look at this, we need to make sure we're speaking the Word of God. Not just religious opinions, not just my ideas or your ideas.

Spiritual birth is going to happen when the Holy Spirit is ministering the Word of God. That's what causes men to be born again. So, we need to be seeing conception.

And we need to ask ourselves, you know, if not, why not? It is something we do need to be, I need to be asking myself. Are we seeing this enough? And if not, we need to search our hearts and see, why not? That's what, we're here to help others be born again. Alright, now after, for a regular body, think with me.

For a regular body, after there's been conception and birth, what's the next critical element for a body? Growth. And I'm going to call this stimulation. You're going to want to see stimulation.

How is a body stimulated? How is an infant naturally stimulated? What does an infant need more than anything to have the right kind of growth? Food. And especially an infant, milk. Look in 1 Peter 2.2. This is, we need to make sure we are providing the right nourishment to stimulate spiritual growth.

So we'll need 1 Peter 2.2. As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, they may grow their body. Good. I also want you to look at, there's another way to make sure stimulation occurs.

Look in Hebrews 10.24. Hebrews 10.24. Okay. Some of the versions will say, spur one another on. Some will say, let us consider how we may provoke one another.

But that is the idea. Our relationship with one another should be a stimulus to one another for growth. Amplify to stimulate.

To stimulate, to provoke one another, to stir one another up. So the relationship, if we are properly relating to one another as a body, the good effect that we must be looking for is we are being stimulated to grow at a good, healthy pace. Personally, and really even corporately, we need to grow as a body.

The next verse really goes with that too. Let us not give up being together as some encourage one another. That's right.

And I think that encouraging one another goes beyond a Sunday morning and a Wednesday, doesn't it? And you know, it's not possible for all of us here to see one another daily. But I'm encouraged that there are those of you here who see each other much more often than just a Sunday or Wednesday. Because we need a regular and constant stimulus to one another.

You know, we can't get it all done on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night. But this is a relationship. We need to be encouraging one another, checking on one another, ministering to one another.

And it should be producing growth, you know, as a body. And growth in ways like this. Our relationships could grow deeper, more intimate, more trusting.

We get to know each other better. I know, you know, Kenny's here and I'm going to probably be poking at him a lot this evening because it's cattle. I mean, you're not satisfied with just a bunch of calves out there born.

You know, one of the things that is super important and you're trying to measure whether you and your brother and your dad's work is being effective is, what kind of growth rate are we getting on these animals? What's the growth rate? How much pound of flesh do I get for the input of my time and money into here? Because you know, you're not, I mean, you may enjoy it, but I don't think you're doing it just for the pure enjoyment. You know, it's, you may be. I don't know.

But, you know, we need, we need to be met. Are we getting the kind of growth personally, spiritually? Are you and I personally, spiritually growing in our own knowledge and wisdom and understanding of Christ? And are we growing in our relationships? More trusting, more loving, more patient. Are we seeing less strife, less anger, you know, less division and a much deeper oneness? This is growth.

And we must be measuring this. We must be aware of this to know if it's working. If we're not seeing that, something's not working.

And we need to find out. We need to seek the Lord as to why. And as each of these as I share, conception, stimulation, these should be things we are praying about.

We should be asking God to bring this. We want to see those in our lives that we're concerned with. We want to see them born again.

And then if they are born again, we want to see the ones that are born again. We want to see them grow. And then if they're growing, and if you're growing right, what's the next thing really after stimulation? One of the things that I put here, and I'll repeat.

Let me see what you think it is. Not only do you need a good growth rate. And this will usually be probably a direct result of a good growth rate.

Well, that's part of it. An appetite. Well, the appetite is part of it.

That's going to be a good healthy sign of that. Maturity. Maturity is part of it, and that's where we're going.

The next thing I have on here is stabilization. Or strengthening. Because this is really important.

And this may relate better to a tree than it would maybe an animal. Because when you first get a tree, and you don't want to just pour a bunch of nitrogen on it. If you pour a bunch of nitrogen on it, you're going to get a fast growth rate.

But you want something more than just something you can see. What in a tree is extremely critical in addition to a good growth rate? Deep roots. Deep roots.

You want it to become rooted and established. And this is really critical for us because most of you will know this, and you will relate to this spiritually. There will be times in your life where you have spurts of growth.

I mean, it just seems like, boom, you're growing. It's quick, it's quick. And then, it's not uncommon at all that there will be a doubling out period.

Does that mean nothing is happening? Well, you have to check and see whether that's true. But are the trees really growing out there right now? Around us? No. But you know what? There's things going on.

They're alive. And it's just going on underground. And it's imperative that if you are going to have a good tree, that it has a deep and well-established root system.

Look in Colossians 2, verses 6-7. So again, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, rooted and built. Okay.

There's three words. Rooted, built up, and established. You know, when they first began to form colonies here in America in the early days of the founding of this country, some of the first ones that they established aren't here.

Because they never became established. They never became fully rooted. We want to see, and a good sign of a healthy spiritual body is that the things that God is doing in us personally, and the things that God is doing in us corporately, will last.

It's not a fad. It's not, well, I think I'll get spiritual for 12 months. Maybe 24 months.

I think I'll attend church 18 months. That was fun. I did that.

It didn't work. I mean, there are people like that. You want deep, genuine spiritual work to be permanent.

And if it's rooted and it's established well, it will be permanent. And it can take, and trees that are well established can endure drought, heat, storm, wind. So we want to see that the work of God in ourselves personally is permanent, and that's corporately is permanent.

We want to see this happen in our lives. And the next thing I have in addition to stabilization is what Ray mentioned. It kind of goes, these three are kind of hard to distinguish from one another, but I'm just going to put it this way anyway.

Maturation, maturity. Because ultimately, you are trying to produce a fully grown, a calf, I'm not sure what they call it, a calf, heifer, or when you sell it. You're trying to achieve an animal that reaches the purpose you're raising it for.

Whatever stage that is, we've talked about the Greek word perfect, mature, complete. The idea of it reaches the stage it was designed for. Now, in this life, it's not going to be perfect in the sense that God is perfect.

Flawless, untemptable, blameless, unchangeable. No, not that far. But our goal is as perfect as possible.

Pressing onward, desiring ever more to be as complete as we can. Because there are, there were and are still, such things as mature believers. And those are called in the scripture, spiritual men.

And this idea is mentioned, look in Ephesians 4, and this is not, a lot of this is reviewed, Ephesians 4, 11-14. Ephesians 4, 11-14. It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach the unity and the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Okay, so Paul is saying, whatever maturity he meant in his mind, the Greek word there is teleos, that word for, we talk about being perfect. He had in his mind, there is a state of constancy, stability, maturity, we can achieve. And that's why apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists are given, so that we would be built up, because it says so that we would no longer be infants.

So whatever this state of maturity is, we know what it's not, it's beyond the state of infancy. It's a state where we have grown, been strengthened, become established, and I believe it's a level of stability called maturity. And really, honestly, we still need to be careful all our Christian life, but it's at that point that I'm the closest to the eternal security of the believer.

I'm not a once-saved-always person like that, but when it comes to, when people get to this point, when they grow and become established and they're stable, I don't think we're going to lose many saints like that. I think their faith, their strong, and their security, because it even says of deacons, it says this in Paul's mentioning to Timothy, those deacons who serve well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith. So when there is a maturity process happening in a believer's life, it shows a confidence that it's not time to be careless, but they've achieved that place by a good growth, by becoming rooted and established, by living by faith, and that's going to carry them a long way.

They continue in that way, they have a reason to be secure. So you can begin to look at security at that point. Ray? Verse 14 gives the opposite.

And it goes on to say, but in all things grow up into Him. Now you notice what we try to make the center of our focus here, knowing Christ. You know, we don't try to split hairs over particular things, because if you really want to grow up, it must be growing up into Him.

We personally, individually, you and I should know Christ better personally. And corporately, we should know Christ better. And that will produce this, and stability.

And we just won't be blown and tossed by various kinds of teachings like that. Okay, now this, the next one may throw you for a loop. What? Once you've been conceived, stimulated, become stable, and grown into maturity, Huh, okay, you're mature.

What's that for? You're finished, you've done your job. Huh? Time to go to work. Actually, what I call this next one is capitalization.

What's that? It's time for profit. It's time to produce a product and gain. You know, capitalization is to grow.

It's to produce goods. And ultimately, spiritually, personally, and corporately, that should be a sign of a healthy body. Is that we start to bear fruit.

We begin to increase in number, in understanding, in wisdom, and in effectiveness. And for this, look in John 15, verses 2-6, and then verse 8. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. Every branch that beareth fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Is that 8 you said? Well, 2-6, and then verse 8. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye accept that ye abide in me. I am the vine, and ye are the branches.

He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same, bringeth forth much fruit. For without me he can do nothing. For man abideth not in me.

He is cast forth as a branch, and is withered. And men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. Here it is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.

So shall it be unto you. Can we say this? Jesus and the Father, He's not really interested in decorating the earth with Christians. You know, boughs and leaves and branches are quite pretty, aren't they? But He's not planting vines so He can see green leaves out there.

He's planting vines, and He's asking us to abide in Him, that the result of it would be, personally and corporately, we are fruitful. Bearing much fruit. And now, we may have to look at that sometimes, but we need to understand that, that is a sign that it's working.

That it's going well with us. We are bearing fruit. If we are not bearing much fruit, we need to be looking.

We need to be seeing what's going on. What does a good vine dresser or gardener do to help the vine produce fruit? There's pruning, and they work with it. They fertilize.

You know, He just doesn't walk by it and say, how beautiful, it's just so lush and green. He is the measure of how good a stock it is, and whether it's doing well, is how much fruit is He receiving from it. And He's not interested in just showing how generous He is.

He's got a lot of room for branches. That's a nice thought, but that's not what He said. Jesus said, every branch in me that beareth not fruit, God's a capitalist.

That's not making me money. That's a waste of my time and energy. That shouldn't be drawing energy from the vine.

Cut that one off, and make room for one that will be productive. That's God. He's very clear on that.

He's loving. But His love, He wants His love to produce fruit in us. He's fruitful.

Look what He's done. He is the great Creator, and out of Him just comes abundance of fruit. And if we're abiding in Him, and we're doing well, that's going to be one of the things we look at.

Now, this part of this, something we've looked at before. Again, a lot of this is reviewed. 2 Peter 1, turn there and look at verse 8. And we'll back up and probably look at a couple of other verses.

But let's start by reading verse 8 before we back up. 2 Peter 1, verse 8. For if you possess these qualities, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your life. Okay.

If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they'll keep you from being ineffective and unproductive. It must be that the Lord doesn't want us to be ineffective and unproductive. That's not His desire.

And what qualities are they? He begins to name them from verse 5 on. Therefore giving all diligence to add to your faith, virtue, virtue, knowledge, knowledge, self-control, self-control, godliness, godliness, perseverance, perseverance, brotherly kindness, brotherly kindness, love. If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, these are the ones.

If these things be in you and abound, they'll keep you from being ineffective and unproductive. And ineffective comes from the Greek word, a negative a plus the word ergon. Ergon is the word for work.

But this is a participle. It'll keep you from doing things that aren't working. God doesn't want the result of our spiritual life to be it's not working.

I'm not being changed. Others are not being changed. I just keep coming to church and just going through the ritual.

I come Sunday, I come Wednesday, I come, I come, I come, but it's not working. That's not what God's after. God's after producing something in us that is very effectual, that works, that's dynamic.

And it says ineffective or unproductive. Unproductive. Unproductive is also begins with the word a and it's the word karpos.

And that is the word for fruit. Basically, it'll keep you from not working and having no fruit. So, go ahead.

Verse 10, that's what you were saying about the, that's right. Because it says, and if you do these things, you'll never fall. And you'll receive a rich welcome in the eternal kingdom.

And that's what, see, we ourselves will search our own hearts, personally and corporately, to see, is it working? Are we adding these things? Do we have these things in us in increasing amounts? In other words, are we growing in virtue? What does it mean to be growing in virtue? Here's what that would mean. As husbands and wives, your relationship's getting better and better. As parents, your relationship to your children is getting better and better.

It's more virtuous. There's more patience. There's more understanding.

There's better communication. There's a warmer affection. This is virtue flowing from you.

You're, you're, you're, you're, how you are on the job. Your co-workers see you as dependable, reliable, considerate. That's virtue.

Virtue at work. You're adding, it's measurable, knowledge. Many of you are growing in your knowledge of God.

I'm encouraged by that. And may we grow even more. Virtue, knowledge, self-control.

So if self-control is growing, what's becoming less? Outbursts of anger. Outbursts of frustrations. Are becoming, are decreasing.

As self-control increases, lack of control decreases. These are measurable things we should see personally. Now, how does that affect us corporately? We should be getting along better and better.

Less division. Less and less division. Less and less faction.

More and more one. I think that's happening. So that's how we need to measure good and healthy growth.

These things need to be in us and abound. And they'll keep us from being ineffective and unproductive. Now, I said I was going to take this to the place where it relates to what's upon a lot of our hearts.

Because really, once these things, and I'm going to rename them. Let's go back through. Conception.

Some of you probably took notes. Conception. Stimulation.

Stabilization, right? Is that right, Nix? St... How do you spell that? Is it I-L? No, it's that, right? Stable, how about that? Did I not do that? Stable, thank you. Stabilization. Okay.

Maturation. And then capitalization. Once these are beginning... Capitalization.

Once these things are happening. You know what? Especially once we reach maturity. First John puts it this way.

When John wrote to Christians, the Christians that he was writing his letter to. He placed them in three categories. Do you remember what three categories? Remember he said, I write to you, little children.

Then I write to you, young men. Then I write to you, fathers. Interesting.

I think there are stages of growth. You know what he says about the little children? I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven. That's kind of where we start, isn't it? That's one of the first things we're aware of when we're first conceived.

Our sins are forgiven. And we're brought into a realization that the Father loves us. And then he says, and I write to you, young men, because you're strong.

The word of God lives in you and you've overcome the evil one. That's... You know, there's a stability. There's a maturity.

It's getting mature. Then he says, I write to you, fathers, because you've known Him from the beginning. And here's what I heard a minister say about the fathers.

You know what fathers are? They're nurturers. They're people who nurture life in others. They're people pouring out their lives for others.

It's not about themselves. It's about others. And that's when you... So here's what I know.

If you're doing well in the Lord, you know what your concerns are more and more? They're outside yourself. Your concerns are about how other people are growing. Do they have their needs met? Are they doing okay? Are they doing well? You're satisfied.

You feel... You're receiving the joy of the Lord. You're enjoying the love of Christ. But your concern becomes, how are others doing? And that's maturity.

And that's probably where some of you are with your family. If you've been going through this process, and it's at work in you, then you can think... You know, the more obvious it becomes that you're changing, it's easier for you to see how great a need other people in your life are that have not been changing. Suddenly, as you grow in Christ, your concerns for where they're at grow with it.

And that's the way it should be. And that... This is where I want to... This is where I want to take us in this. Because what we just talked about is, if we want to answer the question, is it working? Is it effectual? And we want to think of it even beyond ourselves.

What will cause my relationship with those that... We'll say outside of our fellowship here. Family members. Friends.

Co-workers. Whoever it would be upon your heart. What's going to make your relationship with them become effectual? What does the Scripture say is effectual and works? Because this is where we... And this is why this is on my heart.

This is where we really need to go individually and corporately as a fellowship. That's right. That's what the Scripture says is powerful and effectual.

If you're needing greater power and a greater effectivity to reach those people in your life you're concerned with, the only place to find it is in prayer. And that's one of the last areas of growth that we need to dive into. We need to discover powerful, effectual prayer.

Turn to James chapter 5. So in James 5.16 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. You know, a righteous man would describe the person who's come to maturity. He has been born of the Spirit.

He has grown. He has become strengthened and established. He's matured.

And he is becoming effective. And it's the prayer of this kind of man that's powerful and effective. And I want to... It's interesting how this sentence in the Greek is written.

This is the form of the... I'm going to try to kind of lay out the form of the Greek sentence structure here. This is the Greek word poly. We get our English word poly.

What does poly mean? Many. Like, you know, we have our tires are... Polyurethane and many urethanes. And what it means is multiple... like tires are multiple layers.

You know? They're multiple layers. So this is... This is the Greek word for much. And this is the Greek word for force.

Force or power. And it says here that the prayer of a righteous man is much force. And so you see, because here's where some of you are.

You're wanting to see a change in the people you're concerned about. You need much force. You need a force beyond words.

You need a force beyond suggestion. the way you're going to get it is learning to pray. If that's true.

Amplified by a tremendous power. Tremendous power. Yeah, it's a good word for it.

And the word for prayer, which I'm going to mention, comes from the root word to beg. And I'm going to mention that in the Scripture. This word is only mentioned 15 times in the New Testament in this form.

The other word for prayer is mentioned 119 times. This is a form of prayer. I'm going to show you a couple of places where this word for prayer is used.

This is used 15 times in the New Testament, this word. The other word for prayer is used 115, 119 times. But wait until you see a few of the instances.

I'm going to save it for just a minute with this type of prayer. Because this is not talking about well, Lord, bless my family. Thank you very much.

Keep them safe. Amen. It's not talking about that.

This is begging. This is earnest, crying out, rending heart prayer. And this is what creates much power.

It's of a righteous man, a righteous man living by faith. And then it says is effective. And that's let's see in here.

Gumine. Gumine. Energumine.

What are you hearing there? Energumine. Energumine. Ener... Energy.

It's where we get our English word. It is literally could be translated this is energizing. And you know, some of the relationships I know we're concerned about they need an energizing.

They need a power outside of us, outside of our words, to literally with much force come in and energize and move these people that we can't move by our words. And this is done through prayer. This is when Elijah wanted to cause a nation to repent and turn to God.

He stopped preaching and started praying. And for three years, three and a half years, it didn't rain. Y'all seen what happened after six months? Look what's going on in Oklahoma and Texas after six months and no rain.

Three and a half years. Was this prayer powerful and effective? I'd say if it should... It produced the ability to have what happened on Mount Carmel and it happened when he prayed. And if we're going to see an effective, powerful, energizing force upon the people we're concerned about, we're going to have to learn to experience begging prayer.

Individually, you and I personally, and as a church corporately. We need to grow in this area. And it will produce things that we're not going to produce otherwise.

Now I told you I'd show you some of the instances where that word, that word deesis is that word for prayer. The first one to look in is Luke 1.13. Someone read Luke 1.13. Y'all know who Zacharias was, don't you? John's father. Now, what did it say about John, Elizabeth, and Zacharias? Let's see.

Read there verses, same chapter, verses 5 to 7. Someone read verses 5 to 7, Luke 1. It was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias of the chorus of Abitur. And his wife was the daughter of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord and they had no children.

Because of that, Elizabeth was barren and they both were now well stricken in years. Barren and well stricken in years, but what do you have here? You have a righteous man begging God. You have a righteous man begging God.

And what comes out of it? A man filled with the Spirit from his father's womb, from the mother's womb, of whom not a single person in Israel was ever greater. The greatest prophet of any before him. Because Jesus said in John the Baptist, among those born of women there has never risen anyone greater than John.

And that was an answer of prayer to a righteous man begging God. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. The second place this is used is in Luke 2.37. Well, another place.

I'm not saying it's the second. I just picked several of the fifteen places this is used. I'm going to read Luke 2.37. Okay, this is that woman named Anna who never departed from the temple, but she widowed early.

Look in verse 36. It says that now there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of the Newell, the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity and this woman was a widow of about 84 years.

And it says she never left the temple but spent her whole time serving God and fasting and begging prayers. And what did she get to see before she died? She got to hold in her arms the Savior of the world and prophesy about Him and spoke of Him all over the world. Two of the places, Acts 1.14. Of course, what prayer meeting is this? And why were they praying? Why were they joining? They all joined together constantly begging God.

What had Jesus told these people to do? To wait. To stay in Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high. And that's what they were doing.

In Jerusalem begging God to fulfill what He told them what He promised. And what was the result of this? We call it Pentecost. And 3,000 souls born in one day were baptized in they were in And they were in And they were baptized they were baptized in and they were baptized in and they baptized they were baptized in and they were

baptized in and they were baptized in and they were baptized understanding of the scripture as you're growing.

I mean, because I believe y'all are still studying, and I would encourage you to continue to do that. But I think I can put the other on hold. And we can examine how we're doing in this area and really seek to grow in effectual and fervent prayer this year.

I think it's what's going to make a big difference. Any thoughts on that? That's just what I'm feeling. If you look back on your life, and going back to talking about bearing fruit, what do you do if you don't live? It doesn't look like you've borne very much fruit.

Well, if you're still experiencing the other things that you should, what did Zacharias and Elizabeth do? She was barren. And never gave up. Never gave up, you see.

And you really don't want to be barren. That's right. That's right.

I mean, you don't want to be barren. So you just go, well, you know what Zacharias didn't do? Zacharias didn't do, well, let's talk in God's will for us to have kids. Praise God.

At least I'm a priest. That wasn't his attitude. You know, I'm not saying none of you have to become evangelists or missionaries.

I'm not sending you out to Africa or maybe God won't do that. But every one of us, you know what, the Paul makes it very clear about the saints. All of you keep on praying.

Isn't the scripture written to all saints, pray without ceasing? That's the ministry of us all. You don't know how much fruit you're bearing in other people's lives through what you do. Right, you don't.

Yeah, Randy. Oh, thank you. We need an earnestness that comes out of a genuine God-given burden.

And this is, prayer is something we can grow in and learn in. We can learn of it from studying some of the lives of the men who pray. Because that's one thing, you know, you ladies, you can shake the whole kingdom of darkness from your prayer closet.

You know, most of the great preachers that actually went about and saw tremendous numbers of people converted, they would say it's because someone was always praying in the background. Crying out to God. And the Spirit of God, through their intercession, was infusing the words of the minister.

And giving them, energizing them into the hearts of those that were hearing them. And that's something we can all grow in. And we need to grow in.

Charles Kirk's platform was a group of big, godly men in prayer the whole time. And like Elizabeth being barren, God is faithful with us to make us barren. And desperate, I find.

And as I've grown in the Lord, I've come to find that rivers of living water is not flowing from within me. I'm more like a dried up well. And we have to be empty before we can be filled.

And I find that when I see, or I admit to these things in my life, that all these things I've been doing for the Lord is oftentimes dead. It's not led by the Spirit. And I compare with the reality of Scripture to the reality of the Church today.

The body is rather sick. It's not a body as it should be. And these things over time, probably like with Zechariah, I'm sure it was the same as the state of Israel of his day.

It was dead. It wasn't the way God wanted it to be. And he was probably broken before the Lord.

And the Lord is faithful to make us barren. To take us through seasons. To break us.

To humble us. So that then we can come to a place of desperation. And he can break us until we're ready.

Like he did Moses for four years. It took the Lord four years to break Moses. And when I see that happening in my life and how the Lord has taken me from a point of zeal without knowledge and really worked in the flesh under the law, to now just the opposite where it's lifeless and all the things that I thought I had attained and come to wasn't really true and just broken and realized that I'm barren.

There's not rivers of living water flowing from within me. The body of Christ is not where it needs to be. We're not walking the way we should.

It breaks me. And I know it causes Brother Allen and it should cause all of us to be broken and cry out to the Lord for reality. For a genuine filling of the Holy Spirit.

Not knowledge or stories that we read in a book or whatever. But life. Genuine life.

Rivers of living water where we never thirst again. Never thirst again. Is that reality? I look at my life and I have to be honest and say no.

And so these things have caused me to cry out to the Lord. Let me encourage you as we begin to venture into this. Start immediately.

Act. Act on the Word. How do you do that? Set aside time to pray.

I mean begin your day in prayer. Set aside a time to pray. And when you're with one another, when you're with company, and you're enjoying the fellowship with one another, make a part of that time.

Prayer. Learn to do that. Before you leave, I'm not saying just at the end, but make a part of your time together, prayer.

Let's pray. Spend time together with your friends, praying. I mean, most of you, if you're good friends, they know the ones you're concerned about in your life, you know the ones they're concerned about in their life.

What better people, and you've probably even already talked about it. You've talked about it to each other. Well now? What better than several couples or family? You take those concerns, and you go to God directly.

And you cry out together. Because what did Jesus say? If two or more of you agree. You see? Then practice that.

Begin to practice spending time in prayer together. And we'll talk about this more and more as we go into the study. Direct access to God.

You don't have to go through a priest. The Father is ready for you. We can come boldly before the throne of grace.

And receive mercy and grace to help in time of need. This is the direction I think we're going to go for the next Wednesday night. And so we may have a little teaching on prayer.

Here's what I encourage you to do. Let's do this differently. Let's see what new things Brother Allen has to teach us about prayer this week.

We don't really need a lot. There will be some things to do. You can pursue this on your own.

Bring a testimony about a prayer answered. You may be reading in a devotional. And you may read a short devotional.

On someone that had a tremendously effective prayer. Bring it. Let's share it.

Remember what we were talking about? Stimulating one another on to these things. Not just me. Corporate.

I'll come ready. I don't want to be the only one that comes ready. If you know what the general subject is going to be about.

Bring something. Bring something to contribute to that. Okay? Okay.

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