

# Steps to Fruitfulness

by Bruce Wilkinson

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*Bruce Wilkinson emphasizes the importance of deepening one's love for Christ to achieve true fruitfulness in ministry.*

**Duration:** 1:10:19

**Scripture:** John 13:1

**Topics:** "Fruitfulness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the passage of John 15 and its significance in the context of the conference. He emphasizes the importance of passing on the nugget of truth that God has made strong in one's life to others. The speaker acknowledges his own feelings of inadequacy in delivering the message and expresses his preference to listen to other speakers. He encourages the audience to engage in heart-to-heart communication and not to take notes unless necessary, highlighting the importance of personal connection with God's word.

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## Transcript

It's a pleasure to be at the NAV President's Conference. I remember the first time I rubbed shoulders with a navigator. His name was Dr. Jack Mitchell.

He's in his 90s now, and he teaches at Multnomah, is on the radio regularly, gives weekend conferences in his 90s. I don't think he realizes how old he is yet. When I left seminary, I went up to teach at the school he started, Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon.

And I remembered the time at seminary where he had come to speak at a Bible conference where he spoke four days in a row. I'd never heard of him before, and I'd never heard him speak before, and when he started speaking, he started quoting Scripture. He never stopped quoting Scripture the whole chapel.

And I remember being in such a shock, I said, that man probably quoted every verse he knew to impress the seminary. So the next morning I went in with a little piece of paper, and I decided I would count how many verses he quoted. He quoted 42 verses in 27 minutes.

I don't think he prepared to speak, really. I don't think he needed to, to be honest with you. He'd been preparing for eight decades of his life.

And he just started to speak, and as God led him, he quoted verses in any subject he wanted. And I remember, if you can lust after something, I lusted after his knowledge of the Word. Well, as God led, I eventually went to that school to teach.

And I remember down deep wondering, I wonder if I'll ever be able to spend any time with this patriarch. Well, for some reason we hit it off, and we had a tradition we never talked about, but oftentimes happened, in which I'd walk down the hallway, knock on his door, walk in, and I'd say to him, would you like any coffee? And almost always he would say yes, and I would walk over, grab this dirty cup that he had had for at least a hundred years, and walk down to the other end of the hallway, fill in a cup for him and for me, and come back and sit down in his chair, and he'd lean back in this old, stuffed leather chair that he's had for many, many years, and we began to talk. We never set up the meeting, we never acknowledged we were doing this, and he'd always start the same way.

He began talking about a subject, I don't know where he got his ideas, and then he'd start quoting a verse. Every time. He would stumble in the middle of the verse, look to me and say, Bruce, how does the rest of that go? Do you know for three years I never could finish one? Never was it in John, you know, it was in Ezekiel or Chronicles.

I never finished a verse, and every time he'd say the same thing, Bruce, they aren't teaching the Bible at Dallas the way they used to. I used to really look forward to those times. They were special times in a young man's life.

And I remember being so overwhelmed with his knowledge of the Word and walk with God, and in those days, walkthrough was just starting. And I came into him one day and said, Dr. Mitchell, you know the Bible so well, I'll never learn it like this in all my life. I said, why don't you teach me some of the things God's taught you, then I'll take it and teach it to the men, and then your ministry will go all over the world in another way.

That question expected a yes to answer. And he sat back and he got real quiet, and I began a little bit uncomfortable. He said, no, Bruce, I don't think I'm going to do that.

I figured I did something wrong. And I said, Dr. Mitchell, is there anything the matter? He said, no. Can we still talk from time to time? He said, oh, sure.

But I'm not going to do that. But I'll tell you what I will do. What will you do? He said, why don't we meet, and I'll help you do one thing.

I'll help you fall more in love with Jesus. And then he said, you know, all of the things that you'll teach in your life will come out of your love for Christ. And if we can deepen it together, all the other stuff will take care of itself.

And I can remember so frequently when he would pray at the end of our time, I would feel like an outsider listening to God in the patriarch. He'd forget everything. And he would go in the presence of Christ, and there would be frequent times in which my eyes would get wet as he prayed.

I remember one time, he had really been pushing it, and he was really tired. And you could see it in his walk, and his eyes. And I wanted to encourage him if I could.

And I spent an evening going through the Scripture trying to find out what passage in Scripture I could give to him. And I found one. And it was the passage about Caleb going to take another mountain in his 80s.

Remember that? And I said, this is it. So I walked into his room, and I said, Dr. Mitchell, I have a passage for you. You do? Yeah.

And I said, I'd like to read it to you. So I got out and I began to read the passage. And he said, now just you wait a minute, young man.

And again, I said, oh no, what have I done now? And he put his hand back, and he went like this. And he started quoting the whole chapter. I tell you, that man just marked me for life.

Then there was Ed Goodrick, who used to be around in the early days of NAVS, and Lester Spencer. And then I remember the first time I met Warren Sanney back in 1978 at a meeting in which Dr. Billy Graham invited 80 men from around the country who led Christian organizations to talk about the future. You might remember that.

And that was a very, very exciting week. It was a closed meeting, and they brought in outside men to speak what the future was going to be like in different areas. I remember the head of NASA was there, and a world energy consultant was there.

And they'd lecture about what the future was going to be like. And then they broke us up into groups of 15, and we would then spend the next hour and a half talking about how then shall we lead our Christian groups. And that was the first time, and for some reason, we were in the same group.

And those were exciting brainstorming times. And every time Warren would talk, and I don't even know if he knows this. I just was watching.

He would quote Scripture. And I just went away with a mark again. These Navigator people know the Bible.

And then as time has gone on, I've met Rod and Bob and read a lot of the books that come out of here and read the Discipleship Magazine. My love for the Navs has just deepened. It's kindred spirits.

I thought I finally had a handle on all the characteristics of a Nav until I was at this meeting last night and this morning. One of the unsung characteristics of a Nav, I'm sure, is wit. Dry wit.

Well, I'm both honored and humbled to be here to speak to us and to share. I don't feel at all capable of this position. I'd much rather sit down and listen to Warren or Rod or Bob Foster.

When you think of the passage that they've selected for this conference, take root downward and bear fruit upward. I'd like to speak about that to you this morning. You remember there are three basic goals of the conference.

One goal was to give us more tools for ministry, and I think that's primarily going to be accomplished through the conferences, the sessions, the workshops. The second one was to communicate to us more about the Nav vision. That is the yellow sheet of the Nav ministry.

That's really what it is. And the third is to encourage us in the walk with God, and that's partially my job in this time together. Therefore, let's speak heart-to-heart, not head-to-head, and not mind-to-mind, really,

not even will-to-will, but just heart-to-heart.

And I'd like you to do me a favor, if you could, if you're comfortable with it. I'd like you not to take notes in this session, unless you can't control your hand. Some people in Christian circles, they have to write notes or else they can't get anything from it.

It's amazing that nobody took notes when Jesus spoke. So just kind of sit back and relax. Jesus Christ gave three great sermons that we know of in the Scripture.

It's where most red takes place in your Bible. The first one is called the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, which answers the question. The question being, if you say the way to the Kingdom of God is the opposite from the Pharisees, scribes, and Sanhedrin, the elders, then what is your way how to get to the Kingdom of Heaven? That Sermon on the Mount answers that question.

It's His salvation talk. The second one is called the Olivet Discourse. It answers the question after Jesus was talking about this temple being destroyed and the Kingdom.

If this, Lord, isn't the time you're going to set up your Kingdom, then when will you set it up? And what will be the signs that precede that tremendous event that is the hope of all Israel? The third one is called the Upper Room Discourse. That's John 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. It answers a lot of different questions because His disciples asked Him a lot of questions.

Probably for you and I, of those three passages, the Upper Room Discourse is the part you spend more time in. I know I do, and I think most Christians do. It has the most help per square inch that you can find from Jesus anywhere in the New Testament.

The Upper Room. John 13. Turn to it with me.

Let me see if I can give you perhaps a little bit different picture. I want to center in a passage that you have probably memorized, probably have talked about, and probably think you know inside and out. And that's John 15.

Let's set the scene for that. John 13, verse 1, says, Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come, that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end, and supper being ended. So in John 13, we're in the Upper Room.

We're also in the Upper Room in John 14. The last verse in chapter 14 is missed by many people. John 14.31 says, But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do.

Arise, let us go from here. I believe they left the Upper Room at the end of chapter 14. The Upper Room discourse really isn't in the Upper Room the majority of the time.

It's only in there in the first two chapters. We don't know where He is in chapter 15. We don't know where He is in 16.

We have an idea where He is in 17. But John 18.1 gives us the next identification. When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the brook Kidron where there was a garden which He and His disciples entered.

So if you look at it, John 13 and 14 is in the Upper Room. 15, 16, and 17, we're not quite sure from John where He is. John 18.1, we're back across the brook Kidron and we're in the garden.

You might know that the Upper Room was in the upper part of Jerusalem, on a hill. He came down some stairs probably that are still there today, one of the few things that are still there. Came down through the valley.

Here's the temple. Came around the corner, crossed the brook Kidron, went up the Mount of Olives into the Garden of Gethsemane. That's what He did.

He was here, John 13 and 14. I believe 15 down along in here, 16, 17 on the other side, and 18, the betrayal and all that that took place. I think He was on His way walking in John chapter 15.

Before you get to John chapter 15, you need to understand what's going on. It starts out, right before John chapter 13, Luke teaches us that they're arguing about who's going to be the greatest. That sets the pattern.

They come in to the Upper Room. They would have already taken a bath and got clean. They were going to, in a sense, a party, a very formal occasion, this Passover.

They would have walked there and the normal tendency would be for a servant to wash their feet when they came in the door at a formal occasion like that. Nobody did it. Nobody did it because everybody was trying to prove they were the greatest, and the greatest would definitely not wash feet.

I mean, that's a real tough thing to do. I'm sure everybody looked at everybody else. Jesus, of course, the guest of honor of the whole situation, quietly, probably in a corner so nobody could stop Him in the midst of it, took off His outer garment and began washing feet.

That's mass embarrassment. I mean, everybody, I'm sure, was looking down, thinking, why didn't somebody else do this? It was going around, in verse 6 it says, then He came to Simon Peter. I believe Simon Peter was the last person He washed feet.

As you might know, most of us think the Upper Room was built around a table like that in which people sat this way, leaned down on this shoulder and ate. I think He washed feet all the way around to the last person who was here, my man Peter. You know who was supposed to wash the feet if there was no servant? The person who sat there.

That's why I believe Peter didn't want Jesus to wash his feet. I should have done it. Lord, are you washing my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, what I am doing to you, you don't understand now, but you will after this.

I'm sure Peter said, what do you mean? I understand this. I should have washed the feet. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet.

He was really embarrassed. Jesus answered and said to him, if I do not wash your feet, I'm going to be angry with you. That's what I've expected Jesus to say.

For Him to say this next thing is a really strong overreaction as far as Peter would be thinking. You'll have no part of me just to wash my feet? What do you mean? I've left everything. Because you can't wash my feet, you're going to kick me out? Well, then wash everything.

There was a real little bit of unsettling going on there. No. Verse 11, don't worry about that.

You already took your bath. You are clean, but not all of you are clean. Now, who do you think was thinking isn't? I think poor Peter.

Oh, no. Am I the one who isn't all clean because I didn't wash everybody's feet? I can't prove that, but I think it works. I think there's a little bit of You're not part of me? He didn't say it to anybody else.

So it goes on. Washes his feet. Talks some more.

Verse 18, I do not speak concerning all of you. Chapter 13, verse 18, I know whom I have chosen, but that the Scripture may be fulfilled. He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me.

Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. Uh-oh, what's that about? Peter's still uncertain. Verse 21 really must have bothered him.

When Jesus had said all these things, he was troubled, and his spirit testified and said, Moses, surely I say to you, one of you will betray me. You'll have no part of me. Now I'm sure one of you will betray me.

Everybody around that circle got really upset. I don't know if you can... We don't have time to build this, but biblically I believe they thought this was the time in which the war was going to begin. In fact, right before that, some of the disciples are talking and they're saying, let's go to Jerusalem and die with Jesus.

Now it's not a die on a cross. It is, we're going to fight to bring in the kingdom right now, and it's probably going to be some of us will be killed. So they went to this Passover time almost anticipating who's going to be greatest, who's going to sit on the right, who's going to sit on the left.

Of what? Of the kingdom. It's here. It's ready.

This is the feast. We're going to do it. All the believing Jews are here washing under feet.

Somebody really uncomfortable. No part of me? What do you mean no part of me? Then when Jesus said, I say unto you, one of you will betray me, you talk about a lot of anguish going on at that split second. Then the disciples looked at another perplexed about whom he spoke, which means they didn't have an anticipated answer to that question.

They didn't right away say, Judas, I always knew it, the dirty rat. They didn't know who it was. We have an odd idea about Judas.

Now, let me see if we can see who was nervous. Verse 23. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, Simon Peter.

Oh boy. Therefore motioned him to ask him, who are you talking about? Who was nervous at that time? I believe Peter was. Now you've got to understand why this makes sense.

You're laying on your left shoulder and this person's head is on Jesus' breast. Your eyes are in this condition. A person here is going to have a tough time getting the eye contact of that person.

This is the person who makes the easiest eye contact. We can't prove that. It's all guessing, but it seems to make sense and it makes a nice sermon.

Simon therefore motioned to him and asked whom he spoke, then leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said, Lord, who is it? Jesus said, it is he whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it. Boy, you can't be any more specific than that, can you? It's the person I'm going to give this bread to. So he turns around and gives the bread to the place of honor at dinner.

The place of honor at dinner is the third seat in. Do you realize the impact of Jesus setting Judas at the place of honor when he knew what was going to take place? I love you, Judas. And he turns around and gives it to the man of honor, which you always would give it to first.

That's why verse 28 says, but no one at the table knew for what reason he had said this. Some thought because Jesus had the money bucks that Jesus said to him, buy those things we need for the feast. In other words, nobody knew it was Judas.

Some people believe that the key person here would dip the major piece of bread into the sup and pass it down to all the people. Some other people believe you pass it along. But what I'm trying to show you is this wasn't a giveaway.

Nobody saw that it's obvious it's Judas, even though he gave the sup first. Peter didn't think it was Judas. Peter thought along with everybody else he had to go buy something.

So who is it so far? I don't know. I know I wouldn't like to be Peter. Verse 31, so when he had gone out, Jesus said, now the Son of Man is glorified.

You've got to think where they are. That is, the war is coming. The kingdom is coming.

We're going to defeat the Romans tonight. That's the only way they know the Son of Man was going to be glorified was the kingdom. And God is glorified in Him.

And if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself and glorify Him immediately. Little children, now what were they expecting Him to say? Let's get ready. Look what He says.

Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. What's they expecting then? Because I'm going out to lead the war. Then what He says, You will seek Me, and as I said to the Jews, where I'm going, you can't come.

So now I say to you, who were these Jews? Because He had said that too. They were the people who wanted to kill Him. And now Jesus, in the middle of all this thing, turns around and says, I'm going someplace and even you can't follow Me.

These are the same people who said, we're going to go to Jerusalem and die for Jesus in a war. And I'm sure everybody's thinking, boy, is Jesus overreacting just because we just didn't wash feet. Don't you think that's what He was thinking? That's what I've been thinking.

I've been in fantasy ticked about us not washing feet. Sometimes we make the Bible so up here. That's what I'd be thinking.

Next time I'm going to wash those feet no matter what the argument is. Well, that surfaced the key question that brings all through chapter 14. That's poor Peter.

He's really upset. Verse 36, Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, where on earth are You going? Jesus said, Where I'm going, You can't follow Me now, but You shall follow Me afterwards. Peter said to Him, What do You mean? Why can't I follow You now? I'll lay down my life for Your sake.

Do you think that that was an honest or a deceitful answer by Peter? I think if a man came in at that moment and said, Peter, will you die for Jesus? I think Peter would have said, Now, kill me. Don't you believe that? I believe that. Verse 38, poor Peter.

Will you lay down your life for my sake? Most assuredly I say to you, Peter, that the rooster shall not crow till you have denied me three times. Who's the betrayer? I think Peter thought, if I'm going to deny you three times, I'm the man who's going to betray you. How can I betray you? I'll die right now for you.

That's why the next word out of Jesus' mouth, Let not your heart be troubled. Who do you think he said it to? Peter. Now, I think everybody else's heart was troubled, but mostly Peter's.

You believe in God, believe also in me. Now, here again, Jesus threw them another curve. In my father's house are many mansions.

Wait a minute, they'd all been to his dad's house. His dad's house was a poor carpenter house. It wasn't a mansion, and there were no rooms in it.

And you better believe they were thinking, what on earth is Jesus talking about? Where is the mansion? Maybe he's taking over Herod's temple. Yeah. The kingdom's coming in, who's being dethroned? It's Herod.

And if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you, and I go to prepare a place for you, and we'll come again. Okay. And receive it to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

And where I go, you know, and the way you know. Wait a minute, Jesus just said, I'm going and you can't follow. One paragraph before that.

Now he's telling them, you know where I'm going, and you know how to get there. No they didn't. In their mind they didn't.

So good old Thomas asked the second key question. First one was, where are you going? Peter asked that in verse 36. Second, Thomas says, we don't know where you're going.

How can we know the way? Then Jesus turns right around. What were they expecting him to say? It's down the road. Turn left.

Right? It's a war time. It's time for the overthrow. If you don't believe that's what they were thinking, you haven't read Matthew and Luke.

They're arguing on who's going to stand on the right side and on the left side. Of what? Poor Thomas. I don't know how to go there, and I don't know where you're talking about.

Jesus says, I am the way. You are? You just told me you're leaving and we can't follow. And the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except by me.

Now, the Father's a new idea in here, except he's gone to his Father's mansion, but they don't know who his Father's mansion is. They've never seen his Father's mansion. And as far as Scripture's concerned, we don't have any talk about Father's mansion before.

This is new stuff. If you'd known me, which they had known him, you would have known my Father also. And from now on, you know him and have seen him.

Wait a minute. We know Joseph, but that's not who you're talking about. No man see the Father at any time.

Even Moses didn't see the Father. Philip asked the question, Lord, let's get just one thing clear here. Just to give us one thing we understand.

Show us the Father and it's enough. You better believe it's enough. Poor, poor Philip.

Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long? You've not. If you'd known me, Philip, he who has seen me, has seen the Father. How could you say, show us the Father? Philip must have been thinking, wait a minute.

You have a father. I've never seen your father until now. And if I've seen you, I've seen your father.

I don't know what Andrew and Nathaniel were thinking at a moment like that, but I've got to believe these guys around the table were really wondering what's going on. See, somehow we think they understood this like we do. They didn't understand it like we did.

That's why twice in the passage he says, now I tell it to you before it comes that when it does come, you may believe that I am He. You know what this is? Mass confusion until later on. That's right.

And then all this looking back makes sense, but not in the middle of it. Isn't it interesting? When Jesus Christ teaches, He almost always leaves more questions than He gives answers. And how much we want the answers with no questions left.

I don't know about you, but God leaves more questions in my life than He does answers. So, Philip says in verse 8, show us the Father is enough. Jesus answered that question.

Then it goes on to some more things. In verse 16 it says, I will pray the Father and He will give you another Helper that He may abide with you forever. Even the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him.

Oh boy. Nobody else can see it but us. Where is He? But you know Him for He dwells with you and He'll be in you.

What's going to be in me? The Spirit of Truth. And I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you.

A little while longer and the world will see me no more, but you will see me because I live. You will also live. And that day, and the day that they interpreted it meaning was the day the Kingdom begins.

When the war breaks out and all the promises God gave to Israel from the days of Abraham right on through. When the Messiah will reign on top of that mountain and the mountain will split and a great river of life will overflow and all the Gentiles will come to find wisdom and peace and the Lion of Lamb will lay

down and the sword will no longer be there. Those are the promises of that day.

Jesus wasn't talking about that day. He was talking about the day of resurrection when He was going to come. And at that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.

And He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is He who loves me and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Now so far if we read that, that doesn't seem extraordinary. But to the disciples, He should have never said that.

Who's the Messiah going to manifest Himself to? To who? The world. Jesus just said, I'm going to manifest Myself to a small group of people. The Kingdom! Judas, verse 22, not ascared, said to Him, Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us and not to the whole world? You're supposed to do the whole world.

Don't you know Isaiah, Zechariah and Ezekiel? Don't you understand what was going on? All these questions without any answers. Except later on, they were answers. Jesus goes on to talk some more about peace.

Look at verse 27. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Man, you had every reason in the world to be afraid. Peter is going to deny Christ. Somebody is going to betray Christ.

Jesus is going away someplace He can't come. But if you see Jesus, you've seen the Father. And He is the way of the Father, but He hasn't told us how to get there.

You talk about an anxious moment. Just a little bit before that, maybe an hour or two, they're arguing who's going to stand on the right and the left side when the Kingdom comes. Now they're really confused.

Verse 30. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. Wait a minute.

Who is the ruler of this world? Jesus is the ruler of this world. Why, He's raised the dead. They just saw Lazarus a little bit before that.

The blind, the deaf, the dumb. He's done it all. What do you mean the ruler of this world? Is Herod coming? You're over Herod.

Who is the ruler of this world? I thought you were going to set it up tonight. Look what He says about the ruler of this world. And He has nothing in me.

What? You're not the ruler of this world? And He has nothing in you? Then where are we? Maybe this whole thing was a big mistake. I should have never left my fishnet. Wow.

Verse 31. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and that the Father gave me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go here.

Oh, mercy. That's the background of John 15. There wasn't a dry palm in the group.

And I'm sure, ladies and gentlemen, when they came to the upper room, there wasn't a confused mind in the group. They were sure they knew what was going to happen. And now every single thing they thought

they understood, even to the point that the ruler of the world isn't Jesus, and that Jesus has no part in Him, is God.

There wasn't a man who walked out of there with his head up, I don't believe. I think the balloon was popped. There's not going to be a war.

There's not going to be no kingdom. What happened to Jesus? Skip 15. Set the other half.

Chapter 16 is filled with revelation about the Holy Spirit. Chapter 16, verse 16, to the end of that chapter, is filled with predictions about Christ's death and resurrection. They still didn't understand it.

Chapter 17 is when Jesus Christ prayed, not the Lord's prayer, but His own prayer, for Himself in the first five verses, 6-19 for the disciples, and 20-26 when He prayed for all believers. And then He's arrested in chapter 18, and that's it. So, take a look at it.

13 and 14, upper room. Great fear. Great fear.

Skip 15. 16, Holy Spirit, I'm going to die and resurrect. I don't understand that.

17, the prayer, the falling asleep, all that stuff, the betrayal. I mean, this deepened what happened here, so they all ran away. Why did they run away? I didn't run away! You're not the ruler of this world, are you? You just told us you're not.

Nestled in that passage is, I think, one of the deepest, most profound, most revolutionary truths for us today in the whole Bible. And I don't think it's understood. I didn't understand this until a couple of years ago.

It has radically changed my life. And maybe God will give you a clear glimpse of what Jesus really left in John 15. If you grab it, you'll never be the same.

It is tied to the verse where it says, take root downward, bear fruit upward. Here it is, the unsettling revelation of the Holy Spirit, prayer, death, one nugget of time. One nugget of time, which I think is Jesus.

All these were questions they asked Him. He had to answer. Peter, Peter, Thomas, Philip, Judas.

No choice. Answer, answer, answer, answer. Revelation of the Holy Spirit, my last chance to give it to you.

I'm going to die and resurrect. I'm going to pray because I need help. I'm going to die.

One nugget of free choice of Jesus to give the last bit of help to disciples. If you knew you were going to die and you got your loved ones together in the room where you were and you had 15 minutes to tell them anything you wanted to tell them, what would you tell them? I tell you one thing. You wouldn't be talking about David keep feeding the dog on a regular basis.

Jennifer, set the table and don't... You take all that stuff and you rip it all apart and you would go to the nugget of truth that God has made strong in your life that gave your life purpose and meaning and you would pass it on. And ladies and gentlemen, that's what I think John 15 is. I think it is the most crucial truth that Jesus could have left to disciples.

Not to new Christians, or just to disciples. Because we misunderstand the ways of God, the way He relates to you and me. We misunderstand it consistently.

We misread His motives and His actions upon us and for that we lose tremendous amount of fruitfulness. Let's take a look at it. I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it might bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. Again, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit.

For without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is cast out as a branch and is withered and they gather them and throw them in the fire and they are burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you you will ask what you desire what you desire and it shall be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit so you will be my disciples. Skip down to verse number 16. You did not choose me but I chose you.

He said to the disciples and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain and that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. That's what I want to speak on for the last few moments. Fruit bearing.

Four levels of fruit bearing. Don't write it down. You'll learn it.

No fruit. Verse 2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit. Category 1. He takes away and every branch that bears fruit.

That's category 2. That bear more fruit. That's category 3. And the last one is in verse 5. I am the vine, you are the branches. Bears much fruit.

There are the four levels of fruit bearing. No fruit, fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. Every one of us in this room fit in those four categories today.

Can a believer bear no fruit? Sure can. That's why it says, listen carefully, every branch in me that bears no fruit. Can a believer bear no fruit? Yes.

Have you had a period in your life when you bear no fruit? Yes. Maybe recently. Maybe you haven't been bearing fruit in a while.

Every one of us has that stage. Now if they bear no fruit for their whole life, that's a different question. This is in me.

No fruit. Fruit. More fruit.

Much fruit. How do you bear much fruit? That's the question. There's some different processes.

Take a look at, for instance, how do you go from bearing fruit to more fruit? What's the method God uses to get a Christian to go from fruitfulness to more fruitfulness? It is not abide. It is prune. It says it right there.

Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, purpose of pruning, that it may bear more fruit. Therefore, how does God go from fruitfulness to more fruitfulness in a believer's life? He prunes us. Now, how does God

go from more fruit to much fruit? It's not by pruning.

What's the word biblically? Abide. Yeah, take a look at verse 5. It says it for you. I am the vine, you the branches.

He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, there are two very, very distinct and separate ways. And that's the reason why most believers don't bear much fruit.

Fruit to more fruit is pruning. More fruit to much fruit is abiding. They are as different as the night from the day.

Who decides when we will be pruned? God does. Who determines how long He will prune us? Isn't it interesting that these are new thoughts to some of us? I went through Bible college, graduate school, have been in ministry for a decade before I understood this passage. Fruit.

More fruit. Pruning. Who determines when the pruning begins? God.

Who determines how long the pruning will go? God. Who determines how hard I will be pruned? Do I have any control over that? Interesting question. What's the purpose of pruning? More fruit.

Much fruit? No. More fruit. If you want to go from more fruit to much fruit, what's the concept? Abiding.

Who determines when I start abiding? I do. Who determines how long I keep abiding? I do. Who determines how deep I will abide? I do.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, in one way, who determines how much fruit a person will bear? Both. God and man. If you've ever wanted to see the sovereignty of God interplaying with the free will of man, there you've got it.

The goal of both of them together is much fruit. I have chosen you for the purpose of bearing much fruit. But God will only bring me and you this far, and then he stops.

Then he stops. He'll knock at the door for the rest of our lives, but he'll never blast it over. The abiding is my choice.

How many have ever been pruned? How many of you love to be pruned? I have a tough time with being pruned. We Christians' misunderstanding of this pruning concept is the primary reason mature Christians get out of fellowship. I believe.

I can't prove that biblically. Let me say that again. For a mature believer whose whole goal in life has grown to the point that I want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart, my mind, my will, the primary way we get out of fellowship is in the midst of misunderstanding pruning.

Why? Because we misunderstand two separate concepts, pruning and chastising. We think they're the same. Do they feel the same? Yes, they do.

They feel the same. The purpose of chastisement is what? It's simple. It's what? That's right.

To get us to stop sinning. Is it to bear more fruit? No. Nothing to do with fruitfulness.

It is to get us to repent, restore, and get back in fellowship. Chastisement has nothing to do with pruning. They are totally separate.

Who determines who starts the pruning? God. How long? God. How deep? God.

Who determines, on the other hand, when I'm going to be chastised? I do. By what method? By sin. And by what doing with it? Staying in it.

Did you stay in sin at all last year? I did. Some tough times last year. Chastised.

Hard. Whose move was it? Mine. Is it always easy to submit under chastisement? No.

My expectations always were, as I grew with God, it would be easier to give in to His will as I got older. Somehow that hadn't happened. My sinful heart is just as sinful as before.

And it wars inside. And my will to go my own way is just as strong. Spirit is stronger in me as I've grown, but that will is there.

No, I don't want to do that. I start the chastisement by my rebellion. Who determines how long the chastisement? I do.

Who determines how hard it comes? I do. Ladies and gentlemen, you must, as a believer, separate the two in your life. What's the purpose of God here? Get you out of sin.

What's the purpose of God here? To bear more fruit. Positive. Negative.

How should I feel when I am being chastised? I ought to feel guilt. Eventually repentant. But what are the other things I'm going to feel before I repent? Shame.

Depression. Slumping shoulders. Lack of fire in your eye.

You don't like other people. You don't want to read the Bible. You don't want to pray.

Amen? Yeah. When it gets tough on the chastisement, we ought to feel those things. The problem is, we always put chastisement and pruning into one thing and therefore we feel guilty when God prunes us because we think we have done something wrong.

Should we feel guilty when we're being pruned? My goodness, no. Should we walk with the shuffle in our feet when we're being pruned? Should the fire in our eyes grow dim when we're being pruned? Should we become alienated like we do when we're under chastisement? The last thing we want to do is to read the Bible when we're being chastised. Because why? Because the Word of God is alive and it will get us on any page we turn.

I mean, you could read him Proverbs and it will get you. What happens is, what's the motivation for God when He prunes me to help me bear more fruit? And what should my response be to His action of pruning on my life? Go ahead. Praise freedom.

A willing heart. A lack of guilt. No depression.

When you're being pruned, you can have the peace that passes understanding. When you identify a pruning experience by God, you stop asking the question, what did I do wrong to deserve this? Ladies and

gentlemen, 98% of all mature believers I know when their life goes through a hard season, eventually come to the bottom line by saying, what have I done wrong to deserve this? And what happens? As a loving God says, my goal for you is to make you bear more fruit. And as He prunes us for that purpose, what we do is we misread His motive, we lose heart, we begin to blame God, we begin to say it's not fair, and we eventually become angry.

And the pruning moves over to what? To chastise. See, the mature believer has gotten rid of most of those big things out here of sin. Still working on pride.

That will always be our challenge. Still working on walking close with God. That will always be our challenge.

But as far as head on big sins, embezzling this money, go be unfaithful to your spouse. You've worked through those things. You're not going to have temptations from time to time.

But the other way is in the middle of God's best work on my life. I rebel. And I think the biggest path to chastisement in a mature believer's life comes from pruning.

There's a road six miles wide coming from pruning to chastisement. And God must lay down the snippers and pick up the paddle. They both feel the same, by the way.

Jesus is the only one, ladies and gentlemen, who'd been with the Father before He came here. And He knew all, all of the magnificent of Heaven and what it will be really like forever there. And Jesus knew I have just a little bit of time left.

And the little bit of time left I'm going to give you the secret of how to enjoy Heaven the most. And I believe it's John 15. It's obvious that the Old and New Testament teaches two things.

One, hell will be real. People will go there. And there'll be different levels of punishment in hell.

Scripture's clear in a dozen passages that there's different rewards and perhaps levels in Heaven. We'll all get there who know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. That's by faith.

Our godliness is by faith too. But the rewards that are given to us on the basis of fruitfulness will impact, I believe, eternity forever. Therefore, Jesus realizing our life is this long and Heaven is forever in line.

And that direction says I have this time to impact your life forever. And therefore, I will do anything I can to help you bear more fruit. Anything I can.

I will even risk my relationship with you when I prune you. Do you realize that's what He did? Every time He prunes me hard, He risks me rejecting Him and breaking fellowship. That's the level of commitment He has to you and me.

The commitment says, I don't care what you do or what you say. It'll be worth it when you get there and you've got to believe by faith that my pruning will make a difference here and here. See, I believe when we get to Heaven, ladies and gentlemen, and we really see our sin from top to bottom and the blood of Christ covering it, all that sin, we will be on our knees, on our face, overwhelmed with the grace of God.

And then we will thank Him for the second thing, the fruit that remains. The grace of God is over both of them. It's only by grace He prunes us continuously.

But ladies and gentlemen, it's the blood of Christ that gets me into Heaven and it's the pruning hand of the Father that's going to impact eternity. The problem is we misread God's motive, don't we? I have for years misread it. And the guilt and the weighted downness and the sluggishness would come because I thought, I don't know what I did wrong, but it must be something.

And God's ticked at me again. And the liberation of separating then the chastising hand from God and the pruning hand of God frees me at this time to say to God, my God, whatever you choose to do for how long you want and how deep you want, you have my permission. That's a frightening thing to say.

Some of you have said that. But boy, does fruitfulness come out. See, what's our normal tendency? Our normal tendency is like a grape vineyard in the first place.

If you leave a grape... We have some grapes across the side of our property growing on a fence. If you do not prune those grapes, they will look wonderful. They will grow leaves everywhere.

And it will be a great big huge bush. And then when you go over to get the fruit, the fruit's not there or it's this big and it's so sour you don't want to touch it. Because the vine gets excited about the wrong thing.

Look at this! Look at all these things over here. God said, wait, I don't care about all those things. The leaves are nice, but cut, cut, cut, cut.

What I want is I planted the vine to bear grapes, not leaves. And the only way a vineyard will really grow grapes, and I've talked to some men who own vineyards, is if you cut that vine way back. Why? I loved his concept last night.

What is the race? Not, what is the race? What is the race? That big. What is my race? When I come out of seminary, I thought my race was this. I had leaves everywhere.

Man! One big worthless bush. One at a time. Snip! What's going to be left, God? This one thing I do.

That takes faith. Why? I love the leaves. Don't you love the leaves? Yeah.

I don't snip my own leaves. Do you snip your own leaves? If you do, you're very unusual. Ladies and gentlemen, you must separate pruning from chastising every time you evaluate your life to say something abnormal is going on.

Which one? If it's here, I better treat it one way. If it's here, I better free God up. How do you do it? I've yet to spank my children and them to wonder, did I do something good or bad? True? But somehow we think that way with God.

I don't know whether God's doing it for good or bad because I can't figure it out. Well, here's what I do. And it's just another seeker like you coming up with an own conclusion.

I ask myself the question, is there some known sin in my life that I know right now? That's usually there. If there isn't, I ask my spouse. Only when I'm in a strong mood.

And just like I love Lucy for the discernment of the spouse is right from God so many times. If that doesn't happen, then I say to God, God, I need to react clearly to you. Therefore, since I can't discern any known sin, I'm going to pray for the next 24 hours that if there's something that you're chastising me for and I'm obdurate about or blind to, that you'll reveal it to me.

At the end of the 24 hours, if you don't reveal it to me, by faith, it's not chastisement. Expect telephone calls. Expect letters from people you hadn't heard about for years.

God will answer that prayer. Many times the answer is, not a thing. And then, ladies and gentlemen, is the delightful, mature response.

God, it's a time in which you want to bear more fruit in my life. It's so tough. I give you the freedom in my life to do whatever you choose to do in any way you choose to do it for however long you want to do it without me getting angry.

It's tough to keep that prayer. Why? Why? Because we're the same. If I want to learn how to run a mile fast, I have to run a mile, and then I have to run faster the next time.

And faster, or else I'm not going to improve. Or I have to run a little bit longer than a mile. And a little bit longer than that.

So how is God going to prune me? Initially, as a new believer, this much pruning. And we scream bloody murder. And as we deepen in God's walk, He's free to come to a main branch, isn't He? That's good.

In fact, that's real good, Bruce. That's better. You felt that, haven't you? Something you thought had to be a part of God's will, and maybe was for a while, no longer is a part.

As we mature, the focus of God saying, only do what I want, all of the time. It's a straight and narrow way of godliness. And God comes in and prunes us to the narrow way.

Well, some of us came in the middle of chastisement. Sure, even to the NAB's President's Conference. Why don't you look forward to today, ending the chastisement? Ask forgiveness, 1 John 1.9. If you need to make a telephone call, call.

Don't write a letter, call. Get it fixed. Maybe you've been in a pruning that you thought was chastisement, and as you now evaluate it, no, it's this.

Then give God freedom. If you've become angry throughout your Christian walk for the pruning that you thought was chastisement, ladies and gentlemen, some of us here need to ask for forgiveness. We've misread the motive of God.

Let's close in a word of prayer. You know, I believe that you want to solidly grow more fruit that remains. Ladies and gentlemen, give God the freedom to prune harder, if He chooses, than He's ever done, or longer than you even would dream.

Why don't you tell Him right now? Lord, by faith, I trust You to prune me. Give me strength to endure. Help me to look to Jesus who endured it all.

Forgive me for the times I have become so angry at Your love that I misunderstood. If you're in a time of chastisement right now, my goodness, let's end it together right now. Boy, down deep you want to end it.

Why not say to Him, Lord, I'm sorry for being away. I'm not happy. Forgive me for my sin.

I'm coming home. Go ahead. And as we close, boy, you are a solid group of believers here this morning.

And you are a delight to the Father's heart. Your heart's desire is a pleasure to Him. Why don't you recommit yourself to narrow your focus to more and more fruitfulness this year? Go ahead.

Tell Him, Lord, I want to focus to fruitfulness. Help me, God. Help me.

And now, Father, I thank You for the Word of God which guides us into all the things You want for us. How needy a people we are and how prone to wander. Lord, how we know it.

Thank You for Your unconditional love for us. To love us enough to prune us when we get angry is beyond the love that we know mostly. We pray, O God, for the blessing, the anointing of the Spirit on our hearts that when we leave this holy place, we'll set aside a sin.

We've become more deeply committed to remaining the example to the people You've put around us. And for these mature Christians, that most of all, we have focused our eyes and our attention to the race that You've given to us. Take away those leaves, God, and bear those great grapes.

Amen.

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