

Fruit Bearing Discipleship

by Paul Washer

Paul Washer emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ for true discipleship and fruitfulness in the Christian life.

Duration: 25:23

Scripture: John 15:2-16

Topics: "Fruit Bearing"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of the teachings found in John chapters 13 to 17, which are spoken by Jesus in the proximity of the cross. He emphasizes that being a disciple of Jesus is not a mechanical or self-willed endeavor, but rather a life flowing from a vital, intimate relationship with Him. The speaker highlights the concept of dependence on Jesus, using the metaphor of a branch and a vine. He explains that just as a branch cannot bear fruit or survive without being connected to the vine, Christians must recognize their absolute dependence on Jesus in order to bear fruit and live a powerful Christian life.

Transcript

All right, well, of course, this is our night of prayer. And I want us to look at the book of John, chapter 15, for just a minute. Now, these discourses, chapter 13, 14, and 15, the importance of these discourses and on into 16 and 17, of course, are marked by the fact of their proximity to the cross.

I think Dr. Piper's been asked before, maybe several times, you know, if you could only say one thing to the world, what would you say? Well, prominence is also seen when a person says, these will be your last words, what would you choose to say? How would you choose to use the last time you've been given to speak and to teach? And, of course, we have here in chapter 13 through 17, some of the most beautiful teachings of Jesus Christ. He begins to reveal to us what it is to truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ. That it is not a mechanical or self-willed enterprise.

It is life flowing from Him into us. Now, that doesn't mean that we don't discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness or that we are lax in spiritual disciplines. But what it does show us is that it all comes from communion with Christ.

You could read the Bible, and I suppose you could memorize every chapter in the Bible, but apart from a vital, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and a dependence that the providence of God has created in

you. Now, what do I mean by that? Do you wonder why you've had so many trials in your Christian life? So many failings that you've seen in your own life. Why? It's the providence of God lovingly creating dependence.

That you would be dependent upon the vine so that you could really bear fruit as a branch. Now, in chapter 15, he says, I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser. He's the true vine.

Now, this is important. Why? We live in a day and a culture where, well, Christianity is finding its power or its source in things other than communion with Jesus Christ. I mean, there are conferences where you can go to get all psyched up with a bunch of other people to serve the Lord.

There are mechanisms and structures and systems that have been put in place to give life to the church. So there are all kinds of vines out there. They're just all false.

They're all false. And they won't bear the kind of fruit that Jesus is talking about. He says, I'm the true vine and my father is the vine dresser.

What does a vine dresser do? He not only cultivates the vine, he not only protects it and waters it, he prunes it. He prunes it. And, you know, there are exceptional cases in Christianity where a young man rises up and becomes exceedingly fruitful.

You have your Robert Murray McShanes, you have Charles Spurgeon. But by and large, especially for young men, I would really encourage them to realize when you first start out, even if you're not called into the ministry, you're just a young boy, a young girl who loves Jesus, you want to realize that a lot of your life is not going to be fruit bearing, but being pruned. And you should care more about investing in a Christlike character than trying to be some fruit producing machine.

Now, the language I just used there is totally contradictory. A fruit producing machine. Machines don't produce fruit.

Vines do. Cultivate your relationship with Jesus Christ. Make that your priority.

You will be fruitful. You will be. You will be fruitful.

Now, he says, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. This is judgment. One of the greatest signs of a true Christian is fruit bearing of some sort.

But he goes on, he says, every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. There is no such thing as an absent God in the life of a believer. In the same way, a true believer.

There's no such thing as a true believer who does not bear fruit. There is no such thing as a true believer who can walk any length of time without seeing providence in his life. God pruning, teaching, disciplining, encouraging, rebuking.

As a matter of fact, I have seen some people who look less like Christians, yet it was so obvious they were Christians because of the inescapable providence of God in their life. I mean, they were beaten from the top of their head to the bottom of their feet, but you could tell they were an individual who could not escape God. Yet there are others who seem quite moral, and yet there was nothing of God in their life.

Nothing of God in their life. Now, he says, you are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you, and if you're a believer here tonight, you're already clean. What is that word? It's the gospel.

It's the gospel that makes us clean. Now he says, abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, and so neither can you unless you abide in me. Now, we could sit here all night and talk about the intricacies of the word abide.

There are several different opinions. That in itself ought to cause us great humility when we approach this text. I can tell you this.

The teaching to be drawn from this verse is dependence, my friend. It's just dependence. A man who doesn't know much, doesn't even understand much about the Christian life, but recognizes he can do absolutely nothing apart from Jesus Christ, will be a fruit-bearing, powerful individual.

What is the chief characteristic that describes the relationship between a vine and a branch? I mean, come on. It's dependence. You see a branch separated from a vine, immediately you tell your youngest son to go out in the yard and throw it in the fire.

Why? It's not going to be put back. Also, you understand, that thing's not going to bear fruit. If it has fruit on it, you say, pluck it quickly.

Why? Because it's not going to last more than a day. Why? That branch exists in absolute dependence upon the vine. Now he goes on.

This metaphor is so striking. We know that if someone was walking down the street and had a branch in their hand, and was trying to sell that branch, you'd say it's of absolute no use. No matter how much he tried to convince you, you'd say he was either a swindler or out of his mind.

It's an absurdity. What good is a branch going to do anybody, a disconnected branch? It's equally an absurdity to live the Christian life in some sort of inner strength or self-will. Even when he says the violent take it by force, that passage is so misunderstood.

It doesn't mean that these strong-willed Christian men who are truly manly men, look at the kingdom and just bust through and take it by force. That's not what it means at all. I'll tell you what it means.

You grown men in here, three of you, fully grown, you could all jump on me and take me down to the ground and incapacitate me. One of you could. There's nothing strong about me at all.

My body is broken. One of you could take me to the ground. But there is a scenario I can put before you in which I would be dangerous to all three of you men if you jumped on me at the same time.

And that is this. If I was drowning, you all have been told that if you see a drowning man, you don't run out there to try to save him. Swim near him, get a branch or something, a stick, throw an inner tube, but don't go out there where he can grab you.

Why? He can take three strong men down to the bottom with him. Why? The terror, the fear, the adrenaline. And that's what it means the violent take it by force.

It's a man who realizes he's so weak, he can do nothing apart from Jesus Christ, and he holds on like a tick, like a shadow. That's what it means. I love that because if it meant the other thing, I wouldn't be able

to do any of that because I'm not one of those strong individuals.

And that's how the weak... Do you see this? That's how the weak become strong. That's the whole principle. The weak are strong because they're literally just fiercely holding on to Christ, not because they're self-willed, but because they know apart from Him, they have nothing.

And in that, they become strong. Now, I've heard story after story from missionary tell me that the first sermon they ever preached in the language of the people, when they were terrified, they felt it was their most powerful sermon. Many of them.

Why? Clinging, just utterly clinging. Now, he goes on and he says, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Now, guys, listen to this. Much fruit. Do you know when the person, the one converted person, in the parable of the sower, what is it, 30, 60, 100 fold? The weakest Christian bears 30 fold fruit.

It's much fruit, but we must be cautious, especially in the culture we live today. Fruit is defined in so many wrong ways. It seems to me that we've come to believe that the fruitful man is the one whose supposed ministry has been noticed by other men.

Do you realize how contrary that is to Scripture? It's contrary to the whole vein of Scripture. So, we can bear much fruit. And I want to encourage you, I want to tell you something.

Those of you who have sincerely followed Christ, you have borne more fruit than you know. I think that could be one of the characteristics you could lay down about the genuine Christian is that he is far more fruitful than he recognizes. You are.

You're far more fruitful than you know. Now, be encouraged about that and go on. Just keep on living.

Don't sit there. You know, most times, something like this is preached. People walk away going, I haven't been fruitful enough, and in the guilt that has just been heaped upon me, I will now go out and attempt to bear greater fruit.

That's not it. You have been fruitful. How do we know that? Because you really are a branch.

And if you really are a branch, you really are connected to the vine, and you really have produced fruit. You have. Just look at your home life.

Look at your children. Look at everything about you if Christ had not come into your life. So, whatever is greater than what you would have been is fruit.

Do you see that? Now, he goes on. I want you to look at something in verse 5. It's not wishful thinking. He doesn't say, I am the branch, and you need to try to be branches.

He makes not a promise, but he makes a declaration of reality. He says, I am the vine, and you are the branches. You know, everyone kind of thinks, what must I do to bear fruit? But I think a better way of looking at it is this.

Instead of trying to be what you think you aren't, why don't you be what you are? You are a branch. You are a Christian. Walk in that.

Walk in what he's made you. Most people spend their life thinking that the Christian life is trying to be something they're not. And in reality, what it is, is be what you are.

And that's really good for temptation, because when the devil comes to you and says, you're a filthy old sinner, and you love sin, so why don't you take a bite out of this fruit? If you believe that kind of jargon, you're going to take a bite out of the fruit. You're going to say, well, what else can I do? But if you sit there, and he comes to you and goes, you're just a filthy, sin-loving wretch, and you love sin, so take a bite out of this. No.

You look at him and go, no, I'm not. I am a Christian. I am a saint.

And although there is an aspect of me, an unredeemed part of my humanness, that is attracted at times by the wrong thing, in the essence of who I am, I am a child of God. And if I do take a bite out of that thing, I'm not going to be happy. I won't love it.

I will be miserable because I'm a new creature. You see that? Now, he says in verse 6, if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up. And they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

We have something of eschatology here, something of what's going to be happening. We have this great idea of a great harvest one day, of a great judgment one day. The wheat is brought into the barn.

The chaff is burned. Similar here, the branches that do not bear fruit, that have been cut off. But here's something that I want you to see.

God says with His people in Jeremiah 32 that He's made an everlasting covenant with them not to turn away from them to do them good. But here's the thing that's the key. You say, well, that's true for God's people, but how do I know I'm God's people? Because He goes on in that same passage and He says this, and I will put the fear of me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.

Can you guys get thrown off by temptation? You bet you can. Can you look sometimes like, oh my gosh, you don't look like a Christian. You're acting angry, you're arrogant, you're spiteful.

There seems to be all sorts of just words coming out of your mouth and hurtful things, and you're not acting properly, and you're full of bitterness. Is that possible for you? Yes, it's possible for me. I describe it so well because I suffer that.

But here's what I want you to see. Could you at that moment deny Christ? You go, no. I can't.

Why? I fear Him. Why? Because He's put His fear in you. And why has He done that? Because He's made an everlasting covenant with you not to turn away from you to do you good.

See how it works? It's very encouraging when you understand how the thing works. Now, in verse 7, if you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. Now, here's something that I want to point out.

That abiding, remember what I said, it's dependence. It's being dependent upon Him. And the Father prunes us to make us more dependent.

But also here, there's this idea of My words abiding in you and asking whatever you wish. I think at least a manifestation of that abiding is a feeding upon Christ's Word and internalizing of His Word and a life of prayer. I don't think you can have this abiding relationship apart from feeding upon His Word and abiding in prayer.

Okay? So, I know you struggle at that. It's not a cause of condemnation for you. Let me share something with you.

So many people look at other people who seem to have great success in the matter of reading the Word in prayer and they think to themselves, that person's just really spiritual or that person has this gift. Let me share with you something and it will be very helpful. Everything that I do personally in the Christian life is a fight.

I have to fight to read my Bible. I have to fight to pray. I have to fight to believe.

I have to fight for joy. I have to fight to love the people I should most love. When you get that into your head, it changes things.

First of all, you say, well, I don't have an excuse. It's hard for me and I don't do it, but it's hard for him or it's hard for her and she does do it. So the only difference between us is not so much gifting as it is fighting.

And where does that fighting come from? Is it that strong-willed person who fights? No, it's the desperate person who fights. You see? Why do you fight so? To hang on so? Because I have no other place to go. I have no other hope.

Nothing is going to be any good unless I fight for this. Now, another thing that I want to point out is look in verse 8. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. Now, verse 16.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain so that whatever you ask of me in my name, He may give it to you. Now, do you notice something that verses 7 and 8 and verse 16 have in common? Verses 7 and 8 end in the discussion of bearing much fruit. Verse 16 begins with the subject of you were appointed to bear much fruit.

Verse 7 begins with ask whatever you wish. Prayer. Verse 16 ends in whatever you ask of my Father in my name, He will give it to you.

Prayer. Fruitfulness. And I think if you miss this point, you've missed the upper room.

He says in verse 16, look, in my providence, I've chosen you to bear fruit. In my power, the first part of 15, listen to me, in my power, you are a branch. I'm going to transform you.

You are a branch. You are intimately connected to me. We are one.

But you can't rest on He has made me a branch. And in His sovereignty, He's appointed that I bear fruit. Look at the way He said you're going to bear fruit.

In both cases, it was directly linked to asking in His name. And what He's telling these disciples is this, look, I'm leaving. I've appointed you to bear fruit.

He even tells them you'll do greater works than I've done. I've appointed you to bear fruit. And what He's telling them is this is the way you do it.

Ask anything in my name and I'll do it. Ask it and I'll do it. Ask it and I'll do it.

So the key to the fruitful life is asking the Father. Now, here's something. This is what puts prosperity teaching totally buried in the ground.

And I wish I had thought this up or could say the Lord gave this to me, but I heard another person share this. And we all know about blessed is the man. Psalms chapter 1. He will be like a tree firmly planted, you know, by rivers of water.

Bring forth fruit in its seasons. Leaf will not wither. All of that.

We know that. Here's the thing that you've got to see. Trees are not, well, they don't eat themselves.

They're not self-mutilating or self-consuming. Trees do not bear fruit for themselves. Trees bear fruit for animals, for people.

They don't bear fruit for themselves. Except that it fall to the ground and another tree be birthed from it to bear more fruit for someone else. Now, here's what I want you to see.

When you go, when you get up in the morning, you should be crying out, God, I want to bear fruit. I am asking to bear fruit. I'm asking to bear fruit in my marriage.

I'm asking to bear fruit in my children. I'm asking to bear fruit in the ministry you've given me. I'm asking to bear fruit in this and this and this.

I want to be fruitful. Because you're glorified in that fruit. Now, if he's really going to be glorified in that fruit, some things have to happen.

First of all, the fruit isn't for you. And secondly, it's not for your glory. Those are two things that can make a very fruitful person barren if they get it wrong.

The fruit's not for you. Even the businessman, who may bring in millions of dollars, he should be saying, Father, I want to bear fruit. I want more.

To give it away for you. And those of us in the ministry, freely it has been given to you. You freely give, you see.

And I can't tell you enough. Charles Leiter and I were talking one time in Romania, and he kept pressing this upon me. He said, Paul, the last thing that Jesus had to say.

And look at how much he's speaking about prayer. It's almost as though he's trying to convince them of something that he knows that's just too big for them to believe. You ask.

Look what he says. My Father, he says, ask whatever you wish. Now here's the key.

I wish to bear fruit for my own glory, for my own benefit. No, I wish to bear fruit. Whatever I wish is in the context of that the Father might be glorified and that people might have an advantage here.

That it might be others' gain. I'll tell you that a person who cries out to God in Jesus' name, asking to bear fruit for God's glory and for the benefit of others will not be fruitless. Will not be fruitless.

We work so much and we ask so little. We work so much and ask so little. Alright then.

Seeing that, let's go to the Lord in prayer. Just real quick, we'll just go through because we've got some new people here. We have a few rules about prayer.

We do not share prayer requests. The idea here is this. We pray prayer requests and others will hear you praying that prayer request.

If we share prayer requests, we'll be here for 30 minutes and it'll look like a town meeting as everyone starts talking about all the newest gossip and news that they'll be able to share. Another thing is this. Please do not bring to this prayer meeting a prayer request that has not burdened you enough to pray for it.

So pray and do not be afraid to pray for yourself. Pray for yourself. I'm going to go ahead and shut this off.

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