

The Butler's Branches - The Phases of Fruit Bearing

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[0 : 0 0] throw this duck. We're just tossing it. We're going to review last week's sermon and kind of move forward from where we were. So if you have your Bibles, find those two places where we were at last week. Go. Yeah. Some of you weren't even here, so what are you going to do? John chapter 15 and Genesis chapter 40. John 15 and Genesis 40.

And we read in Genesis 40 the story here of Joseph being in prison, and he has some company for a short while. It's the baker and the butler. And if you've read this passage, you know they had dreams. Each of them had a dream, and they were sad because they didn't understand what it meant, and there was nobody that could interpret the dream. And then Joseph says, well, interpretations belong to God. Tell me the dream. And so they do. And of course, the butler's interpretation was favorable. The baker's not so favorable. Now, as we read in Genesis 40, we noticed, I'll read again the dream and the interpretation, rather, of the dream in verse numbers 9 and 10. It says, And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches. And it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth, and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes. And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. And Joseph said unto him, this is the interpretation of it, the three branches are three days. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head and restore thee unto thy place, and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand.

And it was all good going forward for the butler. Now, what we noticed in pairing this with John chapter 15, we noticed there was a time element to those three branches that came forth. They were three days. And in John 15, Jesus Christ says in verse 5, I am the vine, ye are the branches. And we looked at you as being the branches in a time element that only thing that really fits is the past, present, and future. And we even noticed in John 15, there are three vines mentioned, or three different descriptions of at least a vine. In verse 2, there is the branch that beareth not fruit, which was the empty vine.

There is also a branch that's bearing fruit, and that branch we called the fruitful vine. And then the third one was the one that he purges, so that it may bring forth more fruit. And these represented the past, present, and future. The empty vine being the branch of the past, where you were without Christ with this world, in times past, being Gentiles after the flesh and on. We connected that to Ephesians chapter 2.

And saw that in the past, without Christ, you're dead in trespasses and sins. And you can't bring forth any fruit unto holiness, as the Bible says in Romans chapter 7, or chapter 6. You're just dead in the God's sight. You're fit for the fire, as it says in John 15 and verse number 6. They are burned.

[3 : 25] The branch of the past is not a branch you want to look like. Now, the branch of the present, where we studied the branch that bears fruit, there ought to be fruit. There ought to be some evidence that you're born again, that your life, that Jesus Christ abides in you. And if you abide in him, then there's no doubt the branch will bring forth fruit. The vine can't bring forth fruit of it, or the branch cannot bring forth fruit of itself. In verse number 3, or 4, it has to abide in the vine. But if that branch abides in the vine, it'll bring forth fruit. And the branch of the present was a branch that bears fruit. And the branch of the present, I said emphatically, ought not to look like the branch of the past. It shouldn't look anything like it. Sadly, it does. Sadly for some, look at you, you claim to be saved, but there's not much evidence of it at all, anywhere. And we want to see it, but it's not about us seeing it. It's about God being glorified, according to this passage. And that's found in verse number 8.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. And so we spent the passage, the rest of the message, discussing the branch of the future, the one that God purges, and made comments that most Christians will avoid this process at all costs. They're just content to bear some fruit, to just have some showing in their life that they're saved, and that they're going to stand before God at the judgment seat of Christ. And they're going to have something that's not all going to burn up, because I've done something. I've prayed, I've gone to church, I've read my Bible, I've done some things for God. I've resisted some temptations. I've dealt with some of the big sins in my life.

But the truth is, most Christians don't really want God to purge them. They don't want God to come in there and start snipping away things that, if you're honest, doesn't belong in your life. Rather, they hold on to them and just say, I've got some fruit. But the branch of the future, the branch that bears much fruit, is the one that glorifies God. Now today, let's consider this. I want you to notice, last week the message was the butler's branches, your life in three limbs. And today I want to discuss the butler's branches again, and this time it's phases in fruit bearing. When you read in John 15, what you see is that verse 5, I'm the vine, you're the branches, he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. You just have this vine, branches, and boom, fruit just showing up. But it doesn't exactly happen like that. And as a matter of fact, there's phases to fruit bearing. And it's not just something that you can study in a scientific manual on this, what's called viticulture. There's a big word. I had to look it up, by the way. It's the study of vines and so forth. He that abideth in me, he's going to bring forth fruit, but the fruit just doesn't, boom, magically appear. When somebody trusts Christ, no fruit just pops up all of nowhere before they say if it's in church, before they leave the building. It can be a long time. I mean, for some it can be, sadly, a real long time. But nevertheless, it can take, it will take time.

There's a process involved. There's stages involved. And when we put a little closer examination on this from the Bible, you're going to see the scriptures teach the process of fruit bearing. Now come back to Genesis 40. That's where we want to be right now, to look at this stage or phases individually of this process.

I think as we analyze this from the passage that it's going to answer a lot of questions or maybe shed light on several things about individual believers and about them bearing fruit for Jesus Christ. Now this is the analogy that God chose that we're studying here. It's not because I have some love for vines or for fruit bearing vines and grapes and things like that.

[7 : 23] That's not why we're discussing this. This is one that God chose and it's a good one. And you're going to see that as we study it, there's a lot to be learned in the cultivation of grapes. Now this exact process is mentioned, believe it or not, in the butler's dream. And I'll take a look again at verse number 10, where the Bible says, and in the vine were three branches and it was though it budded, number one.

And number two, her blossoms shot forth. And number three, the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes. And so from the passage, we're going to call these three phases budding, blossoming, and bearing, as in bringing forth ripe grapes. Budding, blossoming, and bearing.

In the viticulture terminology, the budding process is called bud break, or it's also called bud burst.

But it's the same exact thing as it's mentioned in chapter 40, verse 10. The blossoming phase is called flowering. I don't think that's confusing to anybody. And then the bearing phase, or the bringing forth, some of them put it into two groups, or two parts rather, they call it fruit set.

And it's mentioned as the clusters, in verse 10, the clusters thereof, brought forth ripe grapes, and the second phase of that would be the ripening, all about bearing.

[8 : 50] So blossoming, I'm sorry, budding, blossoming, and bearing. You don't have to turn, but I'll run. I just read this verse this week in Numbers chapter 17. Numbers chapter 17, this three-fold, or three-phase process is mentioned in Aaron's rod.

You remember Aaron and some of them arguing about who's in charge and why they should follow them? God told them, get all their rods, put them in there, and check out what happens. In Numbers 17, in verse 8, it says, It came to pass that on the morrow, Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.

And so there's all three phases, again, of this process. Now, we're going to look at all three and point out several things. Notice several things on all three of these, and I hope that it helps.

I think it will help and answer some questions or shed light on this idea of fruit-bearing in your life. Let's pray before we go any further. Our Father in heaven, we're grateful to come before you through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm grateful also to have this holy book in front of us and be able to open it up, to read and study and consider its truths. But God, without you, we're nothing, and we can do nothing.

[10 : 07] And so it's my prayer to you this morning that you'd help me to deliver this thought and message, and help your people to hear and to receive the truth. And then, Lord, please apply this and impress these thoughts on our hearts and open our eyes and show us where we are and what's going on in our own lives in this phased process.

And, Lord, may, in the end, may the Father be glorified, because we bear much fruit for the Lord Jesus Christ. I love you this morning. Please take this time and use it for your will.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. Number one is the budding. Verse 10, it says, it says it was as though it budded. It budded. Now, something we need to notice right away.

Budding, that's evidence of something, right? I mean, if a branch starts to bud, we know one thing for sure. That branch is alive. It says in the passage in John 15 to abide in me.

The branch abides in the vine. And there's a branch that doesn't bear any fruit, and that gets cut away and tossed into a fire because it's dead. But that tells us something right away.

[11 : 15] The budding is evidence that the vine is alive. Spiritually speaking, the vine is in Christ, and Christ is trying to do something through this branch. And really, that's encouraging to see that a branch is budding.

And in another sense, it's also relieving to see because otherwise the branch just looks dead. And I know if you've got some tree at your house or when this season's coming around, you start to see buds forming.

That's relieving. You know something's coming. And it's a blessing to see that there's life, whereas it just looked like it might have been dead. And that can be a scary thought. You parents think that about your kids when you look at them.

You want to see some buds coming up. You want to see some evidence that God's inside of them and helping them and they're yielding to him and that they're abiding in the vine. You know that eventually you have to turn them over.

You know that you can't hold their hand forever. You want to see that they're capable of bringing forth fruit on their own, that they'll abide in the vine. And so budding can be relieving. It's encouraging to know the Lord is doing something.

[12 : 19] Sometimes this is evidenced by a, we'll say, a new believer when they start asking questions. Forget a new believer. Or any believer that's just living their life. When they start asking certain questions, I'll give you an example.

This has happened to me several times in the ministry where somebody will come up and say, how do you know for sure when God is calling you? Or when God is leading you to something?

And they want to discuss that thing, that process. They want to get an understanding of knowing that this is the will of God and he wants me to do this. And when I hear that question, I think right away, the Lord is at work in their heart.

Praise the Lord. That's a bud that's coming out of the branch. Not everybody in the church is concerned about how do you know if the Lord is doing it.

But when the one person pops up and says something like that, you know God's doing something in their heart. And that's a blessing. When somebody shows interest in spiritual things, there's a bud that's peeking out of the branch.

[13 : 24] And if you go back over your growth as a Christian, I think you'll be able to see moments and you'll be able to see places where a bud broke forth from the branch. You took an interest in the Bible.

Somewhere along the lines, it became a book that you wanted to read and you felt a conviction about and decided I'm going to read that book and try to fellowship with God in that book.

It didn't happen. It doesn't happen to everybody. When God puts that book on your heart and you go to that book and obey him, that's something special. That's a bud that's coming out of the branch.

When you get a burden or feel a burden, maybe for the first time that somebody in your family is not saved and on their way to hell. That's evidence that you're in the vine and that you're alive.

The lost are not thinking about their family going to hell. But when you start thinking about loved ones or a friend you work with and it strikes you that they're lost. I don't think they're saved.

[14 : 25] And I should do something about that. I should talk to them. I should pray for them. That's a bud breaking forth in your branch. When you respond to the Holy Spirit dealing with you about your sin or when you realize this is sin, this is wrong, this thing going on in my life, this is not right.

This is not of the Lord. That's a bud. That's abiding in the vine and something's happening. Something's breaking forth. Now you could ignore it and the bud will just fizzle out and die.

Or you could respond to it. And we'll go to that next phase. God bringing forth a bud on his branch. It's evidence of life. And for some believers, and I could just say this for parents, and I'm not pointing at my children, but just in a broad sense, even as a pastor, buds are great.

That's what you want to see. But the truth is you want to see more. You want to see greater. You want to see more buds. You want to see it all over the place. You would to God that everybody was just budding all the time with ideas and spiritual truths.

They're growing. They're moving. And fruit's on the way. And it doesn't always happen that way. But what it is, and what I will praise God for, is every bud. Every little glimpse.

[15 : 41] Every sign that there's life inside of that branch. That's a blessing from God. And Paul says, I therein rejoice. And I will too. If it's not as much as I want to see, if there's evidence at any rate, praise God that they're alive.

And that there's life. And when I see any spiritual growth or interest in you, somebody else may look at you and say, oh, they got problems. But when you come up to me and say, hey, I'm reading my Bible, I say, there's a bud that's breaking forth of that branch.

They might got other things going on they need to deal with, but there's one that's coming out of them by the grace of God. We'll take it. We'll work with that one. Secondly, about the budding process is there's no indication.

There's no indication when looking at the branch of exactly where or exactly when that bud is going to shoot out. I know you can kind of gauge the season, or maybe you can gauge or suspect a certain spot on the branch, but the exact place of that branch, the exact time, no man can tell.

You can look at these branches, and certain ones will have these growth rings, and you'll say, oh, the bud's going to come right off of that ring there. I know it will, but is it going to be on this side or this side? On the top? You don't know where.

[16 : 57] You can gauge it, but you don't know where. You can't get the exact place. Now consider that. Turn to John chapter 3. The Gospel of John. In this passage, Nicodemus is speaking to Jesus Christ privately, and Christ is trying to unveil spiritual matters to him, what we call the new birth, being born again.

And Nicodemus, it goes right over his head. He just can't grab it. His question to Christ is, how can a man be born when he is old? That doesn't make any sense. Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?

Like, come on, what are you talking about? He didn't get it at all. I mean, right over his head. And so Christ tells him it's a birth of the Spirit. It's not carnal. It's not physical. It's not water.

It's spiritual. And so he makes this illustration to help his eyes be open in verse number 8. He says, The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.

So is everyone that's born of the Spirit, Nicodemus. It's spiritual. It's invisible. It's not something you can harness and grasp. It comes and goes. And so he likens it to the wind.

[18 : 29] And you can't direct or predict the working of the Spirit of God as he moves, as he decides. And relating this to our branch and to the budding process, man cannot cause, he cannot predict, he cannot determine and direct when or where the bud's going to bring forth or break forth out of the branch.

He can only wait for it. When it comes, he can spot it and see, praise God, there's life in that branch. There's a bud shooting forth. But he can't bring it out. You can't draw it out of somebody else.

And there's really no indication of when it's going to come and where it's going to come precisely. You can only wait for it. You can pray to God. You can beg God that he'll work in someone's heart.

You can beg him to do something in their life. But all you can do is watch and wait and look for the bud. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3 that God giveth the increase.

So first, budding is evidence that the vine is alive and it's in Christ. And it's a wonderful thing when a bud breaks forth. Secondly, there's no indication of when and where.

[19 : 46] And you can't direct it. You can't draw it out. You can't make it happen. It's a work of God. And it's his alone to do. And then thirdly, not all branches bud the same.

They bud at different times. They bud at different places on the branch. They may be similar from a distance, but looking closely at them, they're not identical at all. Each one's a unique work. A unique work of God in the branch.

A unique work of Jesus Christ in an individual. And we're not supposed to be carbon copies of any other believer. We're supposed to be what God brings forth from us as we abide in the vine.

Let me illustrate it to you like this. Out here on the side of the church is a few planters along the building. And right now growing high and tall are these wild kangaroo paws, they call them.

And as you leave here, you look down to your right, you'll see them along the side of the building. They're somewhere almost six feet tall. Now, these plants, Eric and I back months ago went back and were snipping and clipping all of the dead stuff and black-looking, I don't know what they're called.

[20 : 54] They're not leaves. They're the, what are they called? I knew viticulture, but I don't know the other cool term. But so we trimmed all this junk off of them.

And I came to notice a few weeks ago that these things are growing. And they're growing again. And it was great. And all over the place they're growing. And some were, some had originally maybe six sprouts and shoots coming up.

And others had more like 10, 12. And as I'm looking around, there's one that's down by the parking lot, down the steps on the right side of that little planter. There's nothing.

And it was one that Eric did, so I thought, oh, brother. There's three by my office windows and two beside the other office. And then one here, one there.

And that one is doing nothing. They're all sprouting and shooting forth, but that's dead. It's empty. And I'm looking at it. I'm looking. I'm thinking, why is there nothing? I mean, all these are going. Why is this one not going?

[21 : 53] What's wrong with it? I know what I'll do. I'll rip it out. That's kind of what's in my heart. You don't want to do what you're supposed to do? Get lost. No time for that. But I thought, well, we'll just wait and see.

Who knows? And I looked inside, and I really looked around to see, is there any shoots? Is there any evidence of anything? And there was nothing at all. Just these green, brown, green things, blades.

So this week, or throughout the week, this week especially, I see these things growing by my window. And I'm like literally every day, they're inches taller, and they're just growing higher and higher. And they're over my head now.

I think a few are just right there. And I came by the one morning, got out of the car, and I walked by, and something caught my eye. And I looked over, and what in the world? There was two little shoots that were poking up out of that one plant that had nothing.

And so Friday, I got curious about this, and I went over and looked at it. And there's those two shoots, and now they're up about two feet tall or so, and they're definitely coming on up.

[22 : 58] And I followed those down and saw that the blade kind of has a split to it where the shoot comes out. All the others are just straight-up blades everywhere. And as I started investigating the plant, I started seeing another one there, another one there.

It looked like there's about five or six more that are on their way. Whereas the others are already putting out, I think one's up to 20, putting out that many on this plant.

This one only has two, but there's more coming. And this thing really, it teaches me something. And it reminds me in this thought of the budding process, Number one, as I said, there's no indication of exactly when and where these are going to come from.

And I can't make it happen. And when I see them, I know, oh, that thing is alive. I'm glad I didn't rip it out. It does have something to do. But it also reminds me that my job and your job, your duty as fellow Christians, one with another, is not to enforce some strict list of rules upon each other and to convert each other to look like me or to look like one another or like some other man or some other ministry, but that this is the timing, this is the work of God when he sees fit as the branch abides in the vine to bring forth a bud.

It's God's job. It's never mine. And it's our job to pray, to maybe assist one another in their relationship with Christ, but to allow the buds to begin when and where God decides.

[24 : 25] You know why? Because the buds come from the inside. I can't pull it out from the outside. I can't start it on the outside. I have to let God do his work. So the budding phase.

There's several things to consider. And finally, remember that the bud is not the fruit. Seeing a bud is a great thing. It's a wonderful thing. There's potential. There's excitement. But it's got a long way to go.

And if there's ever been fruit in your life, it started with a bud. All fruit starts with a bud. And it's evidence that the branch is alive. It points us to the unpredictable work of God in an individual, as well as each individual is a unique work.

And you're not going to look like another. And that one plant that came up late, to the glory of God, it's bringing forth fruit. It's budded. It's blossoming. And it's not supposed to be what the other ones are.

And I would have rather seen that one look like the others. But God's design says, no, this one's fine the way it is. I'll bring forth some fruit as it abides in the vine.

[25 : 30] Secondly, we're going to study the blossoming phase. That's in verse 10 again, where it says, her blossoms shot forth. It's a complete different phase in this fruit-bearing system or process.

Her blossoms shot forth. Now, one thing I must say is that your environment determines a lot about this stage. One of the articles I read on this says, The flowering period can be as short as a day or two under the best conditions or as long as a month under cool and wet conditions.

The environment determines a lot about this stage, about the amount and the time sequence in blossoming. Every flower is a seat of a potential grape.

But not every blossom becomes a grape. Some of them fall off early. Some of them never pollinate. Some clusters have bare spaces in the cluster.

And they're thinner than they could be potentially because of poor environment. Some grapes never ripen to their full because of a poor environment.

[26 : 49] And some of it goes all the way back to this blossoming phase. A poor environment yields poor development in the cluster. So how crucial is the right development?

If it's too cold, it's detrimental. If it's too hot, that tender flower can't handle extreme heat. And it's not going to help it either. It has to be just right. But perhaps there's some here that could bring forth more fruit in their life if they would make some changes to their environment.

Some changes. Maybe they're too cold. They're in a worldly place where the world's lost in darkness. Or maybe spending time with Christians that are cold with hard hearts.

And that's not helping either in this blossoming phase. The environment has a real effect on this step. And it's here in this phase that God says, come out from among them and be separate.

And he says, what fellowship hath light with darkness? He says, get out of that and get into a place and an environment that's going to help you bring forth fruit. The environment's crucial in the blossoming phase.

[27 : 56] Something else let's consider. The blossoms are beautiful. The blossoms are fragrant. And they're a delight to behold and a delight to smell. In Isaiah 35 verses 1 and 2 it says, the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing. The thought of that blossoming phase, it's exciting, it's beauty and it's joy. It's inspiration.

It's the sight and the smell are stimulating to your senses. And it seems for some, this is their favorite part.

Those beautiful flowers. That fragrant smell. But this isn't the phase to aim for. We're aiming for fruit, not for flowers.

Understand this blossoming phase. It's a stage of development that represents or reflects a young and underdeveloped Christian. A babe in Christ. They're immature.

[28 : 57] They're carnal. And it typifies, I think, a large portion of Christianity today. It's just fun. It's bright. It's exciting services. It's stimulating to your senses.

But it's lacking fruit. The blossoming phase is a wonderful thing. It's a lot better than a dead branch, right? But blossoms aren't the goal.

And write this down if you need to write something down. God is not growing flowers. God is seeking fruit. He's not looking for blossoms in your heart and life as much as he wants to see the end game of fruit that glorifies him.

There's another thought here along this line. And that these blossoms are temporary. You know in the Bible you study this out, flowers and blossoms. It's a very common reference to say that the flower fadeth away.

Or that the flower thereof falleth away. That's a very common reference in the Bible. It might sound like it's a negative thing to consider the end of the beauty, the end of the delight, the aroma.

[30 : 05] But it's actually a better thing. While the blossoms can be wonderful, the better thing is for them to fade away and to wither. Because that means fruit is coming. Blossom phase is only a temporary step in the process of fruit bearing.

The blossoms don't last. They were meant to wither and fade. So consider this, Christian, this is serious. Don't get stuck in the blossoming phase. Don't get stuck to where you're just stimulating the feeling.

You're enjoying what's unpleasant to your senses over and over and over and over again. That's the immature Christian. Realize there's a greater purpose to the blossom.

It's trying to move you toward maturity. Toward real fruit that will glorify God. Again, God's not growing flowers. This is a short-lived phase. It could be one or two days.

It's a short-lived phase in the entirety of the process. God's trying to move you into bearing. And that'll be our third phase this morning. Bearing. In verse number 10 at the end, it says, The clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes.

[31 : 14] The bearing process. This is where the real work of the vine and the branch relationship comes together and gets something done. This one takes time.

The other one's short-lived and we don't want to stick there. This one takes some time. It can take two to three months compared to two to three days of the previous phase.

This is not something that can be rushed. This is a process of developing and maturing. And trying to rush this phase can be a disaster. This is something I've witnessed firsthand in the ministry.

Witnessed immature Christians being used to do something for God. Or being plugged into a position or a place when they weren't ready. And in time, it revealed how carnal they were.

In time, it revealed they're unable to lead. Or they're just unfit for this position. And sadly, in some cases, they had to be removed. And those situations, they rarely end well.

[32 : 12] It takes time. Bearing fruit's a time-consuming process. A process where the believer must abide in Christ. He must abide in Christ on a daily basis and slowly develop.

Day after day, abiding in Christ. Week after week of attending church and sitting and hearing and growing. Arriving with your ears open to hear from the Lord.

Your heart willing to obey the word of God. Day after day. Week after week. Week after week. And by little and little. As Paul said in Galatians. Christ is formed in you.

The bearing process takes time. Secondly, about the bearing process. Is that growth can appear rapid. And the reason it appears rapid.

Like something's really going on here quickly. Is because there's a lot going on. On the inside. In the science of it all. There's cell expansion. Or there's first cell duplication.

[33 : 15] Then cell expansion. There's sugar accumulation. There's adjustments in acid levels. And several other things that I can't even pronounce. But there's a whole lot of stuff going on on the inside.

And to the outside it looks like. Man, they're just growing fast. What a great thing to see. But isn't that the truth? That when fruit is forming. There's a lot happening on the inside.

Like a lot takes place. That you can't see. From the surface. From the outside. You don't really know. About these fruit forming moments.

That are happening on the inside. Like that quiet place. Where you open up the word of God. And spend time alone. With the word of God.

Each day. That quiet place. Where you kneel in prayer. Get in your prayer closet. As they say. Or find some place along your bed. Or couch. Where you get on your knees.

[34 : 11] And you pour out your heart to God. And you are vulnerable. And open up before him. And whether you realize it or not. You become more and more dependent. Upon your savior. What's happening.

Is on the inside. Things are going. I spent years of my life. And of. Of just. Spinning my wheels. Spiritually. Doing nothing for God.

And then the Lord got a hold of my heart. And I told you before. About a time where I got laid off of work. And it was a great thing for me. As much as I didn't know it. Where I ended up having time.

On my hands. And I used it to read my Bible. To read other books. That just fed me. Spiritual truth. And I was preparing. Within that year.

To go to Bible school. Before that. To get married. And this was a time. That God gave me. What a blessing. He gave me a few months. Where. To grow me.

[35 : 06] And I had no clue. I wasn't thinking on these things. Or knowing this at all. But as a young man. Single man. There I was. Spending more time than ever. In the word of God. And praying. And growing closer to Christ.

And getting a fire inside of me. For him. And thank God he did. Before I ever got married. Because I'd probably be a bum. We're just a sorry. Proud wretch.

Of a husband. But the Lord was forming me. On the inside. A lot's going on on the inside. That the others outside never saw. They didn't have access. To that private time with God.

Between me and him. And there was growth taking place. From the outside. It might appear rapid. But it's only because there's a lot going on inside. An old elderly lady of the church.

After I'd been walking with God. And getting things right in my life. She. We were having the. You know. A song. A handshaking time in the morning. Welcome time. Whatever you call it. And I was going around. And just saying good morning.

[36 : 01] Some people. And this lady grabbed my hand. I shook her hand in the morning. And she held on to my hand. And she held on. And she's. And I turned back to her. And looked at her in the face. She said. Toby. I just want you to know. That I'm praying for you.

Because I can see that God's doing something in your life. I was like. Praise the Lord sister. Pray on. Prayer warrior. I'll take it.

They were. She was seeing growth. But what she didn't know. And what she didn't see. Was it. Was behind the scenes. Inside. Oh man. God was growing me. I was getting alone with him. This growth can appear rapid.

Is because there's a lot going on. On the inside. And then lastly. About the bearing stage. In this stage. God patiently watches.

As those grapes. Not only grow. But as they start to soften. And they start to change in color. The fruit is ripening.

[36 : 59] It used to be tough to the touch. But now it's soft. And now it's full. And as the branch. Or the fruit. As the fruit reaches maturity. It softens.

And the inner sweetness is peaking. And the outward appearance. Is proclaiming. I'm ready. Ready for what?

You'll have to come back next week. Because that's what I want to look at next week. What follows. When the fruit is ripe. When the fruit becomes ready. When the vine feeds the branch.

The branch buds. Then blossoms. Then bears this fruit. To glorify the father. Then what? And that's what I want to look at next week.

Lord willing. If he'll allow. There's more. So before we get to that. To close this morning. Do you see yourself in here? Do you see other Christians in this process?

[38 : 02] Do you understand why it's not just. Well if you're in the vine. You'd be fruit flying all over the place. If you're abiding in the vine. You're not abiding. Yeah it's true. But there are stages to it. Are you budding?

Has there been any buds in you lately. That are showing evidence of life. That you're abiding in the vine. Has the Lord been dealing with you in any way? He'll deal with you in one way here.

But as time goes. He'll deal with you in another way there. Another bud needs to shoot forth. Having some fruit in the past. Good for you. But each season is a new season. An opportunity to bud.

And to blossom. And to bear fruit for the Lord Jesus Christ. You're not dead. He didn't take you out. So you should still be bearing fruit today.

Praise the Lord if you've got some buds on your branch. That's evidence that he's working on you. And I think there's nothing greater. Than to have God interested in using you.

[39 : 01] And working with you. And putting things into you. And trying to see something come out. There's nothing greater that God would take an interest. In your life. And you could please him.

I hope you understand that. I hope you take it serious this morning. That the little dealings with God in your heart. Or an opportunity for fruit eventually to bear. And to bring forth for him. It's not something that you just say.

Eh, it's not a big deal. Eh, I don't care about that. Oh, it's too much work. Oh, what will my friends think? Oh, what will they say about me? Forget all of that. Decide you want to bear fruit for God. If he brings a bud, a thought.

Something coming inside of you. Let it grow. Is your branch blossoming? If it is, don't get content with the blossoms. Don't be carnal.

Don't be in that stage of a new beginner with just the excitement. And never grow to bear fruit. Abide in the vine. It's a short phase. The flowering phase.

[39 : 59] It's short. The excitement and the thrill. It's time to get to work now. It's time to focus on what this book has for you. What God has for you in this life. Bear fruit.

There's no rushing the fruit bearing, though. It's a daily walk. It's every day. It's God changing you, fixing you, strengthening you, and feeding you so that you can bring forth and perfect fruit in you.

Jesus Christ said, without me, you can do nothing. So you better learn to get to that vine and abide in him. Let's close with a word of prayer. This morning, with everybody's heads bowed just for now and your eyes closed, I want you to meditate on some thoughts this morning.

Last week, it was about looking at your life and understanding how without Christ, there's no hope. It's just death. But in Christ, there's fruit and how God wants to purge you and bring forth more.

But today, we're seeing that this is a process. And it starts with something small. It starts with God putting a seed or a thought inside of you. Or you have an inclination towards something.

[41 : 11] And then it's abiding in the vine. It's about your fellowship with Jesus Christ. If you're not in the vine, you're never, never going to bring forth fruit unto holiness.

Christian, are you bringing forth any fruit? What are you doing? Nobody else is going to confront you about this. It's my job.

Where's the fruit on your branch? How long are you going to wait until you get serious about doing something that will remain?

In John 15, Christ said that to his disciples, that their fruit would remain. Something that will pass through the fire of the judgment seat of Christ. Lord, I pray that you'll deal with hearts.

That you'll motivate us to a fellowship with you. To abiding with you on a daily basis. That we might bring forth fruit.

[42 : 21] May we understand these concepts. And may your spirit give us understanding of the process. And of how you work in our hearts. And how you do the job of bringing forth fruit.

Help us then, Lord, to yield our members as instruments of righteousness. That you might be pleased with our lives. Lord, if there's any here that are struggling with sins and things that are going to hold them back.

With works of the flesh. God, give them victory. Give them conviction. Give them resolve that they might take a stand. And lay it down at the cross.

God, help your children to get victory over their sins. Strengthen us by your spirit and the inner man. That we might bring forth fruit. And glorify you.

God, I believe these people want to glorify you in their hearts. This world isn't helping us. Please give us help. Please give us strength.

[43 : 25] Please do a work in our hearts, Father. We need your help for this. If the Lord's dealing with you, I invite you to talk things over with him if need be.

If he lays somebody on your heart, you want to pray with him, pray with him. And let's have a focus that God gets glory out of our lives individually. We're going to have a song of invitation.

I invite you to come and pray if you need to pray. Otherwise, let's join in singing. Let's all stand and turn to 162.

Let's pray.