

Bearing Fruit

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[0 : 00] What is success in your life? What does it look like to be fruitful in your life? I wonder what businesses you work at or even the communities you are in and are a part of, what is fruitfulness?

Would fruitfulness look like more income for the company? Would it look like happy customers, happy stakeholders? Perhaps in your key performance indicators, it looks like insurance procedures are followed, managing a growing team, having more and more sales.

And maybe even DJ Khaled's song captures what fruitfulness and success is like, which I'm sure will bring some blank faces in the room, but just have a listen to the lyrics.

All I do is win, win, win, no matter what. Got money on my mind, I can never get enough. Enough.

You see, the human condition has always been chasing for the outcome to make something bigger and better, to add more software updates, to bring a new iPhone.

We are all like that. We are people who want to see success and outcomes in our life. And even if we're not, even if we're not the ambitious kind of person, we still want success.

[1 : 24] We still want outcome. It might not be as grandiose, but it might just sound like, if there was just one thing or one challenge in my life, and if that one thing was sorted, then I'd be happy.

The common human experience is this outcome-shaped hole in our heart, and we keep trying to fill it. John 15 gives us the grandest vision of fruitfulness and success in life that is all-consuming, glorious, and majestic.

But unlike any KPI, unlike any success criteria, the one in this passage is satisfying. Friends, I'm convinced that this passage that we have just read answers those age-old existential questions that we are either consciously or unconsciously asking ourselves.

So let's pray. Father God, we are thankful that we can just gather and praise you. If there are stresses in our life that repeatedly trample over our minds, may your peace and comfort intercede for us right now, so we can just hear from you.

For we know in 2 Timothy 3.16 that your word enables us to be teachable, to be corrected and encouraged, and to point us to the life and salvation found in Jesus.

[2 : 47] So help us listen to your word. Amen. So we're currently in a series called Abundant Life, looking at the Gospel of John.

And for the last and the next few weeks, we are in what Bible teachers call the farewell discourse, which is the message Jesus gives to his disciples, preparing them for when he says, well, farewell. Last week in John 14, Dan encouraged us in Jesus' promise of future hope and his ongoing presence through his spirit. And so this week, Jesus continues in particularly that ongoing presence aspect.

It's more of the, now what? If Jesus goes away, what does that mean day to day? What's our purpose? Which is in fact our first point, our purpose.

If you're taking notes or have the St. Paul's app to follow along, I have three points. Number one, the purpose. Number two, the attributes.

[3 : 51] And number three, the means. So let's jump into verse one. I am the true vine and my father is the gardener.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. We are made clear here that Jesus makes an exclusive statement that he is the true vine that the fruit grows off.

Jesus is the true vine. The previous place I was living in, it had this vine that was all-consuming. It would cover the brickwork to the point that it would even start nestling in.

I don't know if you've got those windows that have like panes and so it had like little gaps. And it was healthy because it was growing, growing inside the house, which is not what we wanted. And

there's something unique that we must hear when we look at this image, this all-consuming vine, that Jesus is the vine and that we are his branches.

So let's keep looking at this extended metaphor. Verse eight. This is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

[5 : 08] And he says it again, verse 16. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.

Then again in verse two. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Fruitfulness is so important to God that he even prunes the branches that are already fruitful because he wants them to flourish and abound in even more fruit.

And it is crystal clear that the purpose that we have been made for, the purpose that you have been made for, is to bear fruit. There are no two ways about this. It cannot be that, oh, I'm connected to Jesus.

I'm connected to Jesus, the true vine, but because of the season of life I'm in, I'm just going to take a break from Jesus and bearing fruit. You cannot disconnect the follower of Jesus from the bearing of fruit.

[6 : 21] It was what you were made to do. If a vine bears fruit, through his branches, and if Jesus is the vine, his disciples are to bear fruit.

And so it makes sense that in verse six, Jesus says, If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burnt.

A vine is meant to grow fruit as roses need petals. You know that junk drawer that you have collecting all the odd bits and bobs like nails that fall out, miscellaneous furniture, old batteries, items that don't have a home, maybe some pen lids, all of that kind of thing.

And you're like, just one day, just one day, there'll be a need for it. But ten years later, it's still collecting dust. It's called a junk drawer for a reason.

It's junk. It's no longer filling its purpose. It's useless. And if this is the purpose of all people, if fruitfulness is the purpose for all people, then we ought to ask, are you living out the purpose of the creator?

[7 : 45] Do you even know your creator? Are you fruitful? The thing is, we've already established that in all spheres of life, our success measures can be different.

And unfortunately, we as Christians and even our churches are impacted by the culture around us rather than responsive to our culture. And sometimes we say, fruitfulness must look like a big building or a large number of resources.

But even worse, we can have really dangerous thoughts creep in our community, such as, I know I'm a fruitful Christian because God is blessing me with lots of money, happy kids, and a smooth sailing life.

And to this I want to say, God does not promise any of those things. Nor is that the reality of humanity. For suffering at all levels is the common experience.

So to say that, that would be a lie. We will all have different opinions on what it looks like to be fruitful in your life.

[8 : 58] And so what we really need to do is we need to pull apart what Jesus is saying here in John 15, Jesus the truth vine. What does he mean by fruitfulness? What is fruit according to John 15?

What are the attributes of fruit? Well, let's look at verse again slowly. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

By bearing much fruit, glory is given to the Father. The purpose of fruit is to give glory to God.

Fruitfulness is when God is being made big in your life.

It's when he is made supreme. If Jesus is the vine, the fruit that you bear is all-consuming, majestic and glorious, because it points to him.

It might be different to what our world might expect God's fruitfulness to look like. In fact, I think this reality is actually comforting. It's a comfort, because you can glorify God and be fruitful, even when your child is screaming at you.

[10 : 11] You can be fruitful when the trials of life come, because fruitfulness is not on the account of your measure, but the glorification of God.

So you can rest easy. It's to make him great, not to make you look good. Fruitfulness is not about your success or your glory, but about Jesus' glory.

And in the process of trials, he is refining you to make you more like Jesus. It was great that our Boom Holiday Kids program more than doubled our numbers last year, but I did have to ask myself, would I be all right if we didn't grow?

Or even less? Would we still be fruitful? And the answer is yes, because we got to present lives that heard the gospel and responded.

The number and the success is up to God. It's not up to me. In fact, the Bible uses the term fruit in a range of different ways, and they all lead to the glory of God.

[11 : 29] So there's three that I'd like to mention. The first one is actually in God's very, very first call of humanity as he created the world. In Genesis 1, 27 to 28, it says on the screen, so God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them, and God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply.

This is the fruit of resemblance. You glorify God when you live out your purpose of resembling God who created you in his image. You are an image bearer.

You are his representative on earth. But resembling God from just the knowledge of God is like when you read a book. Think Harry Potter.

It's been turned into a movie. You watch and you see Hermione Granger and one of the characters, and you think, okay, that's not quite what I had in mind when I first read the book, I was thinking more of this than this.

[12 : 36] The director tried their best, but not quite when I was reading the pages off the screen. In the same way, we can't get it right. We can't get resembling right on our own merit.

Our view of God is like looking through a sheer curtain. It's obscured. It's obscured. But there is a perfect image of God who we are called to become more like.

In Colossians 1.15, it describes Jesus as the image of the invisible God, the I am of the true vine.

That I am is his declaration that he is the same God who created you.

He's the same God who was, who is, and will always be. Fruit is when we start becoming more like Jesus. His character, his obedience, his way of being.

The second one is the fruit of the harvest. In fact, it is what God commands and created man for the beginning after the fruitfulness, which is to multiply.

[13 : 45] And it's not just an, all right, let's have five more kids. Please, I would love more Christian kids. There is a shift for multiplication in Jesus' commissioning of his followers in Matthew 28.

It's not just more children, but actually to go and make disciples of all nations. Fruitfulness is when more disciples are made for Christ.

It's the fruit of the harvest. Think of that wonderful verse that Jesus says in Matthew 9. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest. Does your fruitfulness look like seeing new followers of Jesus?

Are you a prayer warrior for the harvest? Are you one of the harvest workers? At St. Paul's, we encourage you to do this by praying one plus one plus one.

[14 : 48] Pray for one person for one minute each day that God might transform their life to be able to hear God's good news and follow Christ. The final one is the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

And what this is really is it captures a renovation and a transformation of the inner heart by the Spirit. It's the character of love, joy, peace, forbearance.

It's a heart that is becoming more like the heart of Christ. And that's what we want to actually see in our community. You can see those characteristics are not private.

They are not solely for the self, but they are deeply relational. If we are all growing in fruitfulness, what a mutually loving community as we forbear with one another, as we are patient and caring and kind with one another.

That's the picture back in John 15, 17. These things I command you so that you will love one another. Growing in fruitfulness leads to a wonderful, other-centered community, but it's also mutual.

[16 : 05] Look in verse 11. It says that this fruitfulness should lead to our joy as well. Because fruitfulness has always been about God's glory and our joy.

Glorification of God leads to our joy. If you're in the room and you're uncertain about whether Jesus and his fruit is worth living for, I really would love genuinely to know a success marker that is as joyful, glorifying, and eternal.

Come chat to me after. Because if you're looking for efficiency in terms of more bang for your buck, let's just say you put 80 hours of work each week.

All the results of that, even the earthly and financial security that you gain from that, ceases eventually. It's fleeting.

You can't take it with you beyond the grave. But, if we can take Jesus at his word, if he is trustworthy, his fruitfulness will be like no other, just like in verse 16.

[17 : 30] His fruit will last forever. But it is a fruitless exercise for you and I to try to be fruitful on our own merit.

As much as I have encouraged you to pray for the harvest, I want to see a desire for transformation in my life, we need to listen very carefully to Jesus' words in verse 5.

I am the vine and you are the branches, whoever abides in me and I in him. He it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus is the agent of bearing much fruit. Remember in verse 1, the father is the gardener. He is the one who prunes, not us.

So we must be careful to think that fruitfulness, success comes from the voice within because it doesn't. So how does someone bear fruit?

[18 : 43] What is it, the means by which we bear fruit? It's in verse 4. Remain in me as I also remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

If you want to bear fruit, it starts in remaining in Christ. It's this image of being deeply rooted in the true vine, unmoving, steadfast in the beauty and ever-growing nature that comes from being a part of a vine that will always produce fruit.

And John's usage of remain here, it's a relational sense of remain, the remaining in him. When you engage with someone relationally, you really get to know them, whether it's your spouse, a friend, even your barista.

Hopefully you get to know their heart, they love coffee, their will, they want to make coffee, and their mind, they know how to make good coffee. And you really want to listen to them. That's what it is to remain in Jesus, to know his heart and love for you, to know his will over your life, to know his mind.

[20 : 05] Remaining in Jesus produces much fruit. That's our role. That's our key responsibility. I wonder if you've ever been in a pattern where there is a sin or an idolatry that you just want to stop happening in your life.

You don't want it to define you. And there is a character trait that just isn't growing. And instead, you might be growing in jealousy or envy. And it's all well and good to know that we're called to bear fruit.

But you feel like constantly you are conforming to the image of the world rather than the image of Christ. Christ. Friend, your call is to remain in Christ.

The fruitfulness comes with wholehearted commitment to remaining. What we must reconcile here is actually in verse 10.

It says, if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my father's commands and remain in his love. The way to understand this verse is that in the extended metaphor of Jesus being the true vine, we need to understand that his vine is not a vine of a former glory that failed to grow and bear fruit.

[21 : 31] He is the vine that grows unstopably on that brick wall. Because remaining is not behaviour or sin management. I'm going to say that again.

Remaining is not behaviour or sin management. It's a total transformation of your being. Because if you remain in the true vine, your obedience, your fruitfulness is purely the natural result of a heart that loves and remains in Jesus.

And you see, Jesus doesn't call us to something to which he has not modelled himself. He's calling us to keep his commands in the same way he has kept his fathers.

And he calls us to remain in his love. And he describes that love in verse 13. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. Jesus is saying that out of all the experiences of love, all the greatest love stories and songs ever written, better than anything Taylor Swift or Shakespeare can write, is a love story of someone who remains and obeys his father's will.

[22 : 52] When Jesus obeys his father in laying down his life, he literally does it for God's glory and our joy. It's because you are the friend he died for.

You're the friend. Jesus' pure, unwavering commitment to you and God the father led to the restoration of what would have been a broken branch from the vine. Remaining in his love looks like the constant retelling of this story to yourself again and again.

It's like having this childlike wonder who wants to read the same story over and over again because it brings them so much joy. It's in every moment, sorrow or praise that you remember the gospel story to remind yourself that you remain in Jesus because he has already remained.

Church, keep remaining in his love, keep remaining in his story. So what does remaining look like day to day?

It doesn't look like going to find that vine on your wall and attaching yourself and tying a knot.

Self-help books, ministry strategies, knowing your star sign or your personality type, a diary, productivity tools, although some being more helpful than others, none of those are the start to fruitfulness.

[24 : 26] Striving and working hard is not the solution to your outcome-shaped hole. Fruitfulness starts in remaining in his story and his love and sometimes you do actually a disfavor to yourself when you think you need to move past the story of the gospel because you've heard it a million times.

And then you start some self-improvement in just becoming a better person in your life. But the passage is clear. We don't move on. We just abide in the gospel even deeper.

So if you've come away from this talk thinking you need to be more successful or you need to try hard at being fruitful, I have really done you a disservice. And I apologise profusely.

If there is anything as a church that we need to focus on, it is the heartbeat of remaining and abiding in Christ. For example, have you thought that the reason why you might not see in your own heart a mission urgency for the gospel is because you aren't in Christ's love and in his story?

It's because you're not in it regularly, day in and day out. If you think of the month calendar and each month having 30 days approximately, each day having 24 hours, there would be 360 waking hours.

[26 : 00] For the more extreme, maybe like 480. I'm going to be honest. I don't know if nearly two hours each Sunday is helping us remain.

Out of those waking hours, that's just 2% of a month. If we even came for every single week, just 2%.

And if that's the amount that we are remaining, we must wonder if that gives us an unwavering and steadfast devotion to Jesus. How about the 98%?

How about all the other days, minutes, and hours? What is consuming our brains, our hearts, and our thoughts? What are you actually remaining in?

As if Sunday is the only time we carve out space for Jesus. But all time is the Lord's. We sing, O great God of highest heaven, occupy my lowly heart.

[26 : 59] But don't occupy my time. Every action, every rhythm of life, every practice builds a heart and will that remains in something.

Whether consciously or unknowingly, you are building a heart that remains in something. It's just whether you remain in Jesus' vine or a fake vine.

And I'm going to say that I have admitted to many people that I do my best work in strategic planning in the setting of late nights and Maccas. Or so many times, like, I do my best work.

But I wonder if I've trained myself to do that over years and years of practice. Now, I'm not saying that's bad. I'm just saying that regular practices that you do shape you.

They can shift your being where your heart chooses to remain. And the best way to grow in this sense of remaining and abiding is setting up our life in a way that helps us remain in the true vine.

[28 : 02] Just even small little steps to get there. So where in your life do you need to start remaining so that you can be fruitful?

Where can you redeem moments of your day for the Lord Jesus? Submit those wills and times to Jesus so that you can remain steadfast to hearing his words and his story.

I wanted to capture that in a really memorable way. And all I could think about is maths. Three simple operations. Subtract, add, and multiply.

It's very Ed Sheeran. And I really did try to put divide, but that's not going to work. Subtract, add, or multiply will help you remain in Jesus.

Firstly, subtract. Maybe there is something that you do that is not helping you remain in Jesus. Something that is taking your time and attention from remaining.

[29 : 05] Subtract it. Cut it out. Remove it. If that's the case, come chat with me. Get some wise counsel with someone who can mentor you and help you grow in godliness.

Chat with someone with a lanyard. Number two, add. Outside of subtracting, there are actually other things that maybe you've never considered in your life that perhaps aren't necessarily bad, but it just takes the mic off Jesus.

Have you thought about curating your media intake? What is it that you read? What are the podcasts that you listen to? Music, TV, YouTube, social media.

And I'm not saying subtract all these things completely from your life, but instead let's add value.

Why don't you add and follow social media sites that help you see Jesus' love and his story?

I've got a ton if you want. Have you thought about listening to podcasts that make you chase Christ rather than chase what the world offers? Instead of just listening to music like, all I do is win, when you're going for a run, play some pump-up worship tunes.

[30 : 21] We've got a St. Paul's playlist. How can you add moments that help you embrace the gospel in your existing structures? Because I wonder if half the battle here isn't this striving to do more and more, but rather just redeeming what we are already doing and adding eternal value.

And lastly, multiply. Maybe we need to multiply rhythms that God has graciously given us that we know are tools to experience his presence and work in our life.

Looks like abiding in his word, in prayer, and community. We keep talking about personal devotional life because we're convinced that is part of you embracing the love of his story and of Christ in your life.

It's a part of remaining in him. So multiply the amount that you're in the Bible. Maybe instead of once a month, it becomes once a week.

Then it becomes daily. Then it becomes day and night. Read the Bible with your spouse, your housemate, your best bud. Increase your church attendance.

[31 : 39] Not so you can tick a box, not so that other people will be happy, but to genuinely hang out with people who are encouraging you to abide in Jesus. Maybe there's someone you love chatting to at morning tea or in your community group.

At morning tea, grab their number. Give them a call or a text during the week and see how they're growing and going and how you can be praying for them.

Church, imagine just if we all chose one thing, not all just one thing, taking one little step.

I'm imagining a church that is genuinely shaping their life to remain in the goodness of Christ's words and his commands. And what overflows is a community that deeply loves, cares, and is sacrificial like the image of Christ who remains with his church.

I can see that God would use this to stand out this community in Chatswood for his glory and the joy of all people.

[32 : 49] And I really want to pray that this is the trajectory of the journey for you as individuals, but for us as a whole community. So why don't you join me as we talk to the Lord?

Father God, unite us as brothers and sisters in Christ who delight in hearing, obeying, and embracing your word. We thank you that your words contain the sweetest voice of Christ who remains on the cross for your glory and our joy.

So we too pray that we might remain in Christ. May you convict us of the reality that we must remain in his love and his story to be unwaveringly devoted to our Lord and Savior.

God bless you, Savior. Grant us the will and desire to take one little step that helps us choose to remain rooted in your love and your saving story for us.

Amen.