

“BUSY PRODUCING NOTHING!”

John 15:1-8

For the past several months we've been considering John's Gospel.

First we considered Jesus' "I AM" statements,
by which He presented Himself as Israel's God, Yahweh,
the eternally existent Creator of the universe.

Then we observed seven of Jesus' miracles which demonstrate
that He is the Christ, the Son of God,
so people will trust Him and receive eternal life.

For seven weeks we listened as Jesus spoke to the crowds,
in the face of rejection, warning them that they're about
to miss their chance to trust Him and receive life.

After Jesus completes His final comments to the crowd,

He turns from His public ministry to give His attention to His disciples.

The majority of Jesus' **discourses in John are addressed to the crowd**,
to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ; that He's God's Son,
so that we might trust Him and receive eternal life.

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” 20:31

In the upper room, the night before His death, **Jesus instructs His followers**
in preparation for their ministry after His departure.

This is presented as a single discourse: “The Upper Room Discourse.”

We're dividing it into several discourses,
because Jesus deals with a number of significant themes.

INSTRUCTION TO HIS FOLLOWERS BY THE SON OF GOD 13-16

John again presents each of these themes with clarity and simplicity.

The words and grammar are easy to understand.

However, the concepts Jesus presents are so counter-cultural that ***God's people invest our entire lives learning to live this way!***

We never quite get it!

WASHING OF THE DISCIPLES' FEET 13:1-20 [13:1-17]

Jesus gives us an example of how we should serve one another.

Those who truly follow Jesus lay aside *our* rights to serve one another.

It may be easy to say we should “wash one another's feet,”

—some churches even practice that command literally,
it's quite another to lower ourselves to serve others.

We never quite come to the place where we're willing to give up our rights and serve other people, who don't *deserve* that kind of treatment.

PROMISE OF HIS RETURN 14:1-14

In the midst of troubling times, we can trust Him and our loving Father.

He promises to prepare a permanent dwelling for us.

He promises to come again to take us to be with Him.

He promises that we'll be able to do great works in His name
that will bring glory to the Father.
That's great theology, and a wonderful hope.
But when WE face uncertain times, is that where our focus is?
Are we conscious of what Jesus is doing for us today?
Are we watching for His coming?
Are we committed to serving Him—to doing great works in His name— even if it leads
to *suffering* for His name?
Where are WE focusing *our* attention, ...
... when we're not sure what tomorrow may bring?
... when we're not sure if we'll have a job tomorrow?
... when our retirement funds are evaporating?
... when we may join Christians in other parts of the world
who are suffering persecution for their faith?
Jesus says: "*Stop worrying!*"
"You can trust me in the dark
—even when you can't see where I'm taking you!"

PROVISION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT 14:15-31

Besides the promise of His return, Jesus also promises to send another Person to
encourage, to counsel and to comfort us.
The Holy Spirit has been present with them before,
but now He will reside within them.
The Holy Spirit will be to them (and *us*) what Christ has been to them.
He will empower *us* for great acts.
He will teach us everything we need to know
and He will bring peace in the midst of hard times.
So, do WE live every moment conscious that GOD is present in us?

In each of these issues, this is *easier said than done!*

[Fourth main theme Christ develops in His instruction to His followers:]

SOURCE FOR PRODUCTIVE LIVING 15:1-17 1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will 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. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This passage points to one of most significant, and least understood,

principles of Christian living!

The way to produce permanent, valuable fruit is to abide in Christ
– to draw from Him that which sustains life.

Discussion of this passage often focuses on what kind of fruit He means.

Is He talking about evangelism, or fruit of the Spirit?

In reality it doesn't matter! The lesson is the same.

Productive living is the result of total dependence on Him.

Our lives will not produce *any* fruit if we try to live in our own strength.

We must learn to draw from Him that which sustains life.

When we depend on Him, we have productive lives.

[Jesus begins by presenting the Father's role in His vineyard:]

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GARDENER AND BRANCHES. 1-3

That relationship is characterized by pruning.

1-3 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.*

Did you notice the emphasis on pruning?

Jesus uses a significant play on words in these verses:

When a branch produces no fruit, He prunes it—takes it away

The gardener cuts off the fruitless branches.

They are distracting the vine from producing fruit.

They get in the way of His purpose.

The theme in this passage isn't salvation; it's fruit bearing.

A fruitless branch saps the energy of the vine from its purpose.

Therefore the gardener removes fruitless branches,

so the vine can work more effectively through fruitful branches.

When a branch does produce fruit, He still prunes it.

This word is actually *more* emphatic:

He *thoroughly* strips the branch—strips it "back to the nubbies,"

so it can accomplish its purpose—so it bears *more* fruit.

In **Central America poinsettias** grow naturally.

In our backyard in Costa Rica we had plants that towered over me—HUGE!

In our front yard in Guatemala (where Felicia Harvey grew up)

we had a plant every 6-8 feet all around the yard.

A gardener told us, "If you want them to do their best,

cut them back every year to about 6" off the ground.

Strip away everything but the main stem.

In fact, if we wanted more, we'd cut off one little piece, 6" long.

As long as we left the "nubbie" on the stem, it would grow.

It was incredible! The ones we buy here never survive!

Jesus tells His followers that the Father prunes His branches “back to the nubbies,” so they’ll produce more fruit.

In verse 3, Jesus continues the play on words.

He tells us *how* **the Father prunes His branches**.

This isn’t about cleaning branches, as though they’re washed off.

“Clean” is derived from the pruning mentioned above.

“You’re already thoroughly pruned—stripped back to the nubbies.”

**The Father uses Jesus’ Word to prune His branches,
so that we become more fruitful.**

God’s Word strips us “back to the nubbies.”

We become productive when God takes us back to the basics,

—He strips off anything that distracts us from union with Him.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VINE AND BRANCHES 4-8 *Remain in me, and I will 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. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

The importance of abiding

Branches aren’t capable of producing *anything*
unless they’re connected to the vine.

Branches obtain from the vine everything they need
to grow and develop, and to produce fruit.

When you separate a branch from the vine,
it dries up and becomes useless.

The only thing left to do is *burn it up*—get rid of it.

When a healthy branch “abides in” a healthy vine,
the branch draws from the vine everything it needs to sustain life.

When we abide in Christ, we draw from Him what we need for godly living.

When we abide in His Word, it becomes the source for godly living
as faithful and fruitful followers of Jesus

The command 4a ESV—“*Abide in me and I in you.*”

This is a two-edged command.

It involves a reciprocal relationship of abiding: We in Him and He in us.

Translation struggle—“*remain*” versus “*abide*.”

“*Remain*” misses sense of connection and dependence.

“*Abide*” is a bit dated; but it indicates more than just staying there

—it implies connection and dependence on the vine.

Jesus commands His followers to maintain a continuing relationship of dependence on Him—intimate contact.

The principle—reason we must abide in Him and He in us.

Based on horticulturalists guidebook: **4b**

“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Branches can’t bear fruit on their own.

They have to stay attached to the vine.

What they need to survive, and to bear fruit, comes from the vine.

Branches MUST stay connected and dependent!

Positive implications of abiding for fruit bearing 5

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Those who abide in Christ become fruitful.

Without Him, we may be busy; but we won’t be fruitful.

We’ll be busy trying to **perform**; but we’ll produce **nothing**!

Jesus doesn’t say “without me you can only do a little bit.”

Jesus says, “without me you can do **NOTHING**!”

Negative implications of *not* abiding for fruit bearing 6 *“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”*

What happens to a branch that gets separated from the vine?

It dries up. It becomes useless.

It’s thrown out on the scrap pile, and ultimately burned up.

Don’t try to make the illustration “walk on all fours!”

Jesus’ isn’t talking to *the crowd* about *salvation*.

He’s talking to *His followers* about *productive living*.

If we don’t remain in intimate contact with Him, we become useless.

The results of abiding in Him 7-8

Immediate results 7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

When we’re in intimate communion with Him, ...

when we abide in Him, ... and His Word abides in us, ...

Our desires are God’s desires—we want what HE wants, ... then He gives us the things we ask for.

Our prayers are answered—because we seek what He wants.

Ultimate results 8 *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*

When we’re in intimate communion with Him, ...

when we abide in Him, ...
 when people see what God is doing in our life, ...
 ... they'll see that we've been with Jesus.
 ... they'll see that we're His disciples.

God is glorified!—by our productive life.

SO WHAT? HOW SHOULD THIS AFFECT OUR LIVES TODAY?

Paul Cedar: Last thing we want to do is to train people to *act like* Christians.

Paul loved to tell a story about their daughter. Debby is their youngest. Like many children of her generation, Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers had a great affect on her life. One day Paul came home and Debby was excited.

"Daddy, I want a Juicy Fruit gum tree!"

Juicy Fruit was running a series of ads, showing what was probably a luscious orange tree in someone's backyard, in Southern California.

Instead of oranges, they used rubber cement and put packages of Juicy Fruit gum on it. It was full of Juicy Fruit gum.

A 3 or 4-year-old would love to have a Juicy Fruit gum tree.

Paul took Debby into the living room, sat down and explained why she couldn't have one.

There's no such thing. After a while she went running off to play.

A couple of nights later, Debby met him again.

This time she said, "Dad, guess what? I've got a Juicy Fruit gum tree!"

Paul, a bit astounded, said "Debby, that's wonderful! Where'd you get it?" She said, "Mommy and I made it! Come and see!"

She took him by the hand down the hallway into her bedroom;

there was a scrawny little tree branch put into a clay base.

Her mother, wisely "let Debby do" and here on the leaves of these little branches were sticks of gum put on with scotch tape.

For some reason, most of the sticks looked strangely empty,

like maybe just the wrapper was left and the gum had departed.

Debby was delighted. She had her Juicy Fruit gum tree.

That's what we try to do.

We try to tape the fruit on. We try to glue it on.

We try to act like Christians.

Jesus says, *"I am the vine, you are the branches.*

He who abides in me and I in him, brings forth much fruit."

Why do we keep trying to tape on the pretty wrapper?

Jesus concludes, *"For without me, you can do **nothing**."*

Spiritual fruit can't be pasted on. Spiritual fruit can't be acted out.

Spiritual fruit is produced naturally when we abide in Christ

—NOT when we try harder!

Breakpoint: Oswald Chambers, *His Utmost for My Highest*: Refers to "the greatest competitor to devotion to Jesus"—our "service for Him."

We worship our *service* rather than *the One we serve*.

“Our biggest danger isn’t worldliness or sin.”

“The trap we fall into is pursuing spiritual success.”

Chambers compares the impact of a life to a flowing river.

He encourages Christians not to focus on where that river will flow,
but instead to focus on staying close to the source.

Chambers believed that the key to spiritual success is to abide in Christ,

to be so identified with Him, that we draw from Him all we need to live productive lives and
to conform our will to His.

“Abide in me and I in you. . . . without ME, you can do NOTHING!”

Are we so busy trying to tape empty wrappers on the tree—trying to accomplish something
for Him, that we miss the real thing

—fruit that only the Vine can produce in us?

Abide in me and I in you. . . . without ME, you can do NOTHING!”