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FRUITFULNESS: THE WORD AND PRIORITIES

by Dan Trygg

The Word of God is necessary to our spiritual lives. Without it there would be no faith, no growth, no life at all. **There is truth that meets us from many areas in daily life**, whether it be through creation (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:18-20), through people (II Cor. 3:1-3), or through everyday events (Acts 14:16,17; cf. Mt. 5:44,45). **All of these can provide profitable seed to those who are open, teachable, and discerning enough to sort out the truth from the error.** This is where the inestimable value of the Scriptures becomes so apparent. In them we have a rich storehouse of spiritual seed, especially prepared by God for our edification and spiritual training (Rom. 15:4; II Tim. 3:16,17). They are a resource to draw upon. The pursuit of the truth of God's Word should be considered an opportunity, a privilege, ...not a duty of religious legalism. We cannot earn points with God by submitting ourselves to rigorous study and devotion to truth, though such discipline is intended to be of great profit to us in spiritual advancement. **Blessed is the one who sees the value of God's Word and pursues it diligently**, with a prepared heart and prayerful spirit, seeking life and direction from Him. Much is to be gained and to be received when this resource is used wisely.

Recognizing our need to grow, and exposing ourselves diligently to God's Word, will not be sufficient in itself to bring about the full blossom of maturity and fruitfulness in our lives. Every seed of truth which begins to find a place within our hearts will not necessarily have its full impact. There are things which we can do to nurture the development of fruitfulness from the Word. **There are choices which we make which can hinder or help new growth.** For example, the new shoot can soon be destroyed by a continued crushing-under of disobedience, a disregard for the new life. The admonition by James, our Lord's brother, to be doers of the Word, not mere hearers, is directed to this point. **Those who do not value the Word enough to put it into action in their lives will find that they soon will forget it.** There will be no blessing for them, only the deception of a self-righteous, outwardly-religious piety, which God despises (Jas. 1:21-27; cf. Ezk. 33:28-33; Isa. 29:13). God seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24), ...and the truth He desires is that of the heart (Ps. 51:6). **The ones who truly desire and seek wisdom will be doers of the Word.** They will respond to the truth which God brings to their attention with obedience. **God promises that such responsive seekers will be blessed in their doing with growth**, both that of further insight and of godly character (Prov. 2:1-4,5,9; Jas. 1:25; II Pet. 1:5-8).

Again, the **new growth can quickly be lost and choked out by hundreds of other "words", voices of distraction which call upon the life resources of the soil**, and which grow louder and louder, until that particular seed of God's Word is no longer heard. We must be wise to continue to carefully cultivate the soil around the new plant, or weeds will creep in and it will be unfruitful. **It has been quite aptly stated that "the good" is the greatest enemy of "the best".** Good things of all different varieties press upon us continually. There are good things which are necessities, things which we *will* have to deal with. There are also good things that are possibilities, things which are not necessities for life as we know it, but things which we would like to do because they seem desirable or fun, ...or things we may do because they seem to be a wise or profitable course of action. However, **good things that are not in proper perspective can become destructive to our ultimate well-being.** For example, the Bible tells us that God has created food for our good. It is to be gratefully received and enjoyed (I Tim. 4:1-5). Yet, there is the danger of becoming fixated on food. **Something can become destructive to us when it ceases to be received as a gift from God, who is to be our delight, and begins to usurp His place in our hearts**, i.e., it becomes the end in itself, *it* becomes the delight. In our food example, this imbalance could be expressed overtly, by obvious overeating, ...or more subtly, by becoming an extreme connoisseur of exotic tastes. In either case, the sensual pleasure received from the food can become too important. As Paul stated in Phil. 3:19, "...their god is their belly."

The same principle applies to physical exercise. In our society, there is great emphasis on physical fitness. Certainly, a regular routine of moderate exercise would be beneficial for most people. However, exercise can also become a destructive activity, if it is not kept in balance. Engaging in heavy or intensive exercise in spurts or binges, without a solid base of a regular fitness routine, can be dangerous. The pulled muscles, heart attacks, and crippling injuries of "weekend warriors" are a tragic testimony of getting too much of a "good thing". On the other side, too much time and energy invested in a routine exercise program can be destructive to one's total life potential by occupying an inordinate amount of one's life resources than is wise. Exercise can become a distraction that keeps one from dealing with real-life issues. Asking, "Why am I doing this?" or, "What am I getting out of this?", may reveal some underlying motivations that can almost be idolatrous. People sometimes are "into" exercise for the sake of personal vanity, or for a feeling of strength and power that counteracts fear and insecurities they may have felt. Studies now show that exercise can actually release chemicals into the bloodstream that have a pleasant, calming effect. Some are thought to be "exercise addicts", hooked on the high that accompanies or follows heavy exercise. **The point is that it can become too important, taking up too much time and energy, so that it comes to be in unhealthy competition with our spiritual walk.**

These examples illustrate how something quite innocent can come to take an unhealthy priority in our lives. **There are literally hundreds of other possible innocent "good things" that compete for investments of moments and strength.** Work, hobbies, interests, and potential experiences of various kinds, present to us opportunities to invest ourselves. It is important to see that it is not only the overt, obvious evil that can keep us from God and spiritual growth, but also the innocuous, innocent, "good things" that can seep away our energies from what we *think* and *profess* to be our heart's desire. **The bottom line is that there is only so much of us to go around.** We only have so much time, energy, and resources to be invested. **Every time we choose to spend ourselves in any particular direction, we automatically exclude all other options. We must prioritize our possible choices,** or we will find ourselves "having spent all" and accomplishing little that we *say* we value. Unless we make these kind of "hard choices, do we not become "merely hearers [of the Word] who *delude themselves*" (Jas. 1:22)?

The apostle Paul stated, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable" (I Cor. 6:12). The word "profitable" literally means "to carry together". The idea is that of a coordinated effort to accomplish a given end. Like runners who attempt to streamline their running form so that there is no wasted motion, no weaving or turning side-to-side, but so that every action of their body is coordinated together, pulling together, bearing the load together to propel them down the track, so **we too need to be aware of our spiritual goals and design our lives to most effectively accomplish them.** It is not the ones who hear with good intentions who find growth. It is those who discipline themselves to pursue godliness, and are actual *doers*, those who go beyond sentimentality and intentions to the actual action of obedience, who are blessed in their doing with greater insight and godly character.

FOR MEDITATION: I Timothy 4:7b, 8

"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

Single-Hearted Simplicity In Jesus

"Right now we are in an age of religious complexity. The simplicity which is in Christ is rarely found among us. In its stead are programs, methods, organizations and a world of nervous activities which occupy time and attention but can never satisfy the longing of the heart."

A. W. Tozer