

# Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

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## FRUITFULNESS: WHAT IS IT?

by Dan Trygg

Jesus revealed that **God's purpose for our lives** as His people **is that we bear fruit**. When we consider the topic of fruitfulness, one of the first questions that we must deal with is: **What does "fruit" consist of?** What is it, specifically, that God is looking for? What is He trying to produce in our experience? Only by first defining what fruit is, can we ask ourselves whether or not we are producing it, or can we discover a means to measure our fruitfulness.

What is "fruit"? In regard to the allegory in Jn. 15, **fruit is the natural production of the life of the Vine**, as it expresses itself through the branches. It is the outworking of that life brought to maturity. **Several observations** can be made here:

**First, the kind of fruit produced by the Vine, and its branches, naturally develops according to its true character** or make-up. The plant itself has only to follow the normal principles of growth. If it has enough nutrients and is healthy, it will naturally follow a built-in blueprint for growth that will ultimately end in the production of the appropriate fruit. Plants never make a mistake and produce the wrong kind of fruit. Is this not what Jesus declared in Mt. 7:16-20? He said that the good tree produces good fruit, while the bad tree produces only bad fruit (vs. 17). It cannot be otherwise (vs. 18). Again, in Mt. 12:33-35, commenting on virtually an identical situation, He states, "How can you, being evil, speak what is good? ...The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil" (vss. 34,35). Or again, from Jn. 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (Cf. Jn. 6:63). All of these verses teach that the plant produces fruit according to its own kind.

**Second**, a corollary of this is **that the plant itself can be identified by the fruit it produces**. Thus, Jesus' statements regarding fruit-bearing (Jn. 15:8), peacemaking (Mt. 5:9), loving one another (Jn. 13:34,35), and loving one's enemies (Mt. 5:43-48) logically follow as marks that identify our life-link with Him. In this context, also, we see the problem of fruitlessness. If there is no fruit, is it because we are not, in fact, truly linked to the Vine? Furthermore, if we claim to be branches of the Vine, and yet are continually bearing rotten fruit, what does that convey about the character or effectiveness of our life in Christ?

**A third observation is that the fruit**, being the expression of the Vine's life, **is not produced by the branch, but rather by the Vine**. It is the life sap of the main plant that produces what is expressed in growth and fruitfulness. The branch, then, is but the plant-built channel through which its fruitfulness is to be manifested. It has no life or fruitfulness in itself. The only outcome for a severed branch is death and decay (Jn. 15:5,6).

**Finally**, fruitfulness is the outworking of the plant's life as it is brought to maturity. It is commonly understood that both plants and animals have reached maturity when they develop the capacity to bear fruit or to reproduce. **The maturity, or completeness, of the plant is measured by whether or not it is bearing fruit**. Furthermore, as

mentioned above, it is by the mature fruit that a plant is most easily and reliably identified.

Father, we thank You that You are looking for nothing more, and nothing less, than for the fulfillment of our potential as branches of the True Vine. We thank You that it is the life of the Vine that makes fruitfulness possible. We begin to understand, too, Father, how it is that our lives are transformed by the power of His vitality being expressed through us. Continue to open our eyes, Lord. Open up to us the mysteries of growth and fruitfulness. Make us aware of the power of Jesus' life within us. Encourage us with a sensitivity to the changing signs of life and growth that are happening in us every day. We praise You, now, Father, for the promise of strength, victory, and usefulness that they are. Lead us on.

**FOR MEDITATION: Matthew 10:24,25a; John 15:5.**

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master.

"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."

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**THE LISTENING ROOM**

"While touring Japan, an American preacher was invited to the home of a pastor for a meal. His host showed him a beautifully manicured garden behind his house.

"He had constructed a small room in the middle of the greenery, barely large enough to seat two people. It had a tatami floor, a sloped roof, and a single door. On the floor was an open Bible. Above the door, written in Japanese, was a small sign. Said the pastor, 'That sign tells how I use this place. Can you guess what it says?'

"The American replied, 'Is this where you prepare your sermons?' 'No,' the pastor replied, 'This is my Listening Room.

"Before spiritual gifts can be properly manifested in cell groups for building up one another, believers must have a Listening Room and must know how to hear the voice of God. The physical location is not as significant as the event. The believer must not only talk to the Lord Jesus in prayer, but also hear from Him in the process. Christ must provide edification before the believer can use it. Otherwise, the 'building up' in the cell meeting is nothing more than the activity of the flesh.

"The point is crucial: one must hear God before speaking for Him. Strengthening, encouraging, and comforting one another in the cell group is to be done as each person becomes a direct agent of Christ's grace. The Holy Spirit's ministry in every participant is the source of the gifts we bring to one another."

from Where Do We Go From Here? by Ralph Neighbor, Jr.