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## FRUITFULNESS: GOD THE MASTER FARMER

by Dan Trygg

**The Scriptures often use the analogy of plant life to depict various aspects of the spiritual life.** In several instances, it is used to describe our relationship to God. In Rom. 11:17-24, God's people are likened to an olive tree, and He is the tree surgeon. In I Cor. 3:9, we are called God's field. In Isa. 5:1-7, the vineyard is used to compare God's relationship to Israel. (This, of course, was expanded upon by Jesus to expose the wickedness of the tenant farmers, i.e., the religious leaders, who would not pay the Owner of the vineyard His due. Instead, they persecuted and killed the servants sent to collect what was owed. Jesus predicted that, upon killing the Owner's Son, the vineyard would be taken away from them and let out to others who would be faithful to the Overlord.) Finally, the passage we have used as the basis for our studies on fruitfulness, John 15, illustrates our relationship to God as that of the branches on the Vine to that of the Vinedresser. **There are some very important principles inherent in this relationship which are well worth our consideration.** Hopefully, they will help clarify for us the attitude and perspective of God toward us, as well as the methodology which He uses with us in His working to encourage fruitfulness from us.

**What is the fundamental principle which any and every farmer must follow to be able to cultivate maximum fruitfulness?** Is it not that **productivity is directly related to the health of the plant or animal?** It is a fact of nature which any farmer must deal with. His job is to bring about maximum productivity from any given seed (or field) by creating, as best he can, the ideal conditions for healthy growth. **Fruitfulness is best encouraged by providing all the ingredients necessary for the healthy, normal growth of the plants involved.** There are really no short cuts in this. There are pre-programmed needs which each particular crop has. The successful farmer is the man who knows, anticipates, and provides for all of these needs at the appropriate time and in the appropriate ways. **Ask any farmer and he will tell you that productivity means planning your involvement with the crop according to its needs and its growth cycle.** You cannot force a crop to grow and be fruitful according to a schedule that is convenient to you, nor without supplying its requirements for growth. The best you can do is to accelerate the process of development by super-supplying its needs.

The application of this principle to spiritual reality is that **God has designed our fruitfulness to follow this same rule. He is interested in our personal spiritual health and wholeness.** He is interested in what will make us truly happy and contented in Him. He has made us new so that we could bear fruit according to our recreated nature. His plan is for us to cultivate that inner life so that it can mature and produce what it was created to produce. He knows that spiritual fruitfulness within us (Christlikeness) and from us (our impact on the world around us) is best produced as we receive all the proper ingredients for healthy growth. Therefore, He has made available to us a wealth of spiritual nutrition, etc., to meet our every need for growth. To state it plainly, God is working for our personal good (Rom. 8:28). He has designed us so that as we receive blessing, and are transformed, we return the sought-for fruit which He is so carefully nurturing. **God, the Master Farmer, is working, and has consistently labored, for our benefit, for our good, our freedom, our joy.** He is the Great Giver and He finds joy in our experiences of joy and happiness (Acts 20:35; II Cor. 8:9; 9:15). As our King, His rule and legislation is for our good, for our health and joy (Dt. 6:24; Jn. 15:10,11). As our Vinedresser (Jn. 15:1,2), He prunes us so that we might come to our full potential (vs. 2). All His works and actions are done in absolute faithfulness (Ps. 33:4,5; Lam. 3:22,23).

The great purpose of history is that all things would be summed up in Jesus (Eph. 1:10). God's great purpose for us is that we could experience the blessedness of His life (Jn. 17:3) and the freedom of Christlikeness (Rom. 8:28,29; Gal. 5:1; II Cor. 3:17,18). Therefore, we will find our greatest freedom and fulfillment as we begin to expect that what God says about us is true. Our *behavior* does not change our *essence*. This was *frustratingly* true when we tried to live as sinners under the Law. Now in Christ it can be *liberatingly* true, if we will believe it. **God is not**

**focused on the old nature, or the old behavior patterns. Instead, He is cultivating the new life, working to expose and remove what hinders its growth and to supply the nutrients and experiences that will produce change, health, and maturation.** As Jesus said, He Himself is the source of our life (Jn. 15:4,5). As unique life-channels, we receive and manifest the vitality of His delightful life as the by-product of our communion with Him. He is good and His faithfulness “reaches to the skies” (Ps. 36:5). Let us freely entrust ourselves “to Him who judges righteously” (I Pet. 2:23; cf. I Pet. 4:19). **Our Master Farmer knows what we need. Unlike plant life, we are conscious and volitional beings.** He desires to include us in this process. Therefore, **as we understand the Vinedresser’s methods and motivations, we can more effectively respond to His prescription for our growth.**

**FOR MEDITATION: Psa. 23:1-3a,5c-6.**

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul...”

“...my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

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## **Adjusting Today’s Church For Today’s Christians**

**The activity of “going to church” is not considered to be worthwhile, positive, or relevant by most people in our society today.** They can’t find much in their understanding of church that is worth getting up for on Sunday mornings. They don’t see much value in being a follower of Jesus, at all.

We have seen this same phenomenon repeat itself throughout the history of the church. **The problem is not about the vitality and relevance of Jesus and Christianity. It is about religious structures, forms and traditions that *used* to meet peoples’ needs that no longer seem to do so.** The forms haven’t changed, nor have the truths that the forms originally expressed or represented. The culture has changed. Unfortunately, Christians have become so locked in on a certain way of “doing church” that they have become rigid in their thinking. **If we are going to be in touch with what God wants to do, we need to change our religious expressions and forms to communicate with the current culture.** What we will find when we begin to ask questions, and to evaluate our forms, is that a lot of what we have been doing for years may not be actually in the Bible at all. There is no direct, formula-type precedent for what we did. In fact, **the Scriptures present an incredible amount of latitude, variety, and freedom when it comes to how to worship or do effective ministry.**

What to do? We must go back to the Bible and ask the basic questions:

What is worship? What are we supposed to do when the church assembles? How can we best do that today? We must evaluate. We must experiment. We must stretch. We must grow. You say, “But I don’t want to change.”? True, it goes against the grain. It shakes up the familiar. It invades the comfort zone. It opens the door to the “unknown”, and we are afraid of that. But, you see, that is what life is all about. We have had to face change from the time we were born. This should be no different, except we have to *think* about it. **Most of us have spent our lives changing and developing our individual selves to walk in patterns that others have made for us.** They saw the need for change and led the way. We have unthinkingly accepted countless advances and changes in life patterns that others have pioneered. **Now God is asking us to be agents of change. He is asking us to be pioneers.** He is asking *us* to have the courage to think it through. Sure, it will feel strange. It will be uncomfortable. It will require effort. Let me assure you, however, to be in tune with what God wants to do in our culture today, to be at the crest of the wave of the Holy Spirit’s reach into our culture, is worth all the effort it takes to get there.