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FRUITFULNESS: INCREASING THE FLOW OF LIFE

To extrapolate from the word picture of Vine and branches from John 15, the Holy Spirit would be, as it were, the sap, the life-flow, of the Vine. It is His ministry to pass along to us, and through us, the strength and vitality of the Vine, so that the growth established in us might be His growth, and so that His perfect fruit might be borne through us. **What can we do to increase His activity in our lives? What part do we play in encouraging the life-flow which is necessary for supporting fruitfulness?** Since God has made us free moral agents, how does this affect the outworking of the mighty Spirit who indwells us (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 3:20)?

Following are four main areas which are basic to a Spirit-directed life:

1.) Persistent prayer. John the Baptist had said that a man could receive nothing except what was given him from Heaven (Jn. 3:27). An appropriate application of this truth was stated succinctly by James, the brother of our Lord, when he declared, “You do not have because you do not ask” (Jas. 4:2). Whoever is hungry and thirsty for righteousness (Mt. 5:6), who is crying out to God from their sense of need (Prov. 2:1-4), will receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Those who desire to be instructed in true Spirit-taught wisdom, must seek God in prayer (I Cor. 2:6-16; Jer. 33:3; Jas. 1:5). **This intercession is not just a single petition. It is, rather, a continuing, persevering attitude of the heart expressed over and over again before God’s throne** (Lk. 11:1-13; 18:1-8). He will be found by those who diligently seek Him (I Chr. 28:9; Jer. 29:11-14). We can be confident that such petitions will be heard and granted (Lk. 11:9-13; I Jn. 5:14,15).

2.) Dependent willingness. The branch that receives the life of the Vine is abiding in dependence upon the Vine’s life, and is willing to grow in response to that life. Any independence or fleshly self-effort cuts off the flow of life (Gal. 5:2-4). Consequently, the expression of the Vine’s character, or nature, in growth and fruit ceases. **There must be a sense of need, an awareness of the insufficiency of mere human effort** (I Cor. 3:3). That is the impetus for waiting upon God and drawing upon the resources of the Vine as communicated by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:5).

There must also be an awareness that He is to be the initiator or leader in our lives. The fruit of righteousness follows after the influx of the sap into the branch, not vice versa. **His leadings will often be contrary to, or different from, our otherwise natural human inclinations** (Isa. 55:8,9; Gal. 5:16,17). **One must be willing to choose to be different, or there will never be any actual change.** By refusing to be open to a new kind of growth in character and action, the Spirit is effectively quenched. Unless the sap is used, spent upon new growth or fruitfulness, there will be no flow of life. We will be left to the resources of our own stale, cistern-like minds and abilities, instead of drawing upon the fresh, abundant gush of living water from the well-spring (Jer. 2:13). Dependence and willingness to be changed go hand in hand. Both are necessary to be taught and led by the Holy Spirit.

3.) Informed attentiveness. In addition to the heart that is seeking God because it knows its need for Jesus’ life, and is willing to bear His fruit, **there is a further need to discern the leadings of the Spirit when He would prompt us.** It is not enough that the resources are available, and that we are desiring, even seeking, to have them operative in us. **The person who would be Spirit-directed must be open and attentive to hear His leadings, and equipped to discern His voice from that of any other.** We are exhorted to “set our minds on the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5-14). This is not only paying attention to His voice, but also implies being instructed so as to be able to “test the spirits to see whether they are of God” (I Jn. 4:1f.; I Cor. 12:1-3). The possibility of deception is frightening to some, and they draw back into a comfortable, well-defined legalism to avoid this very real danger. The problem is that life lived by the law is contradictory to life in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; II Cor. 3:5,6; Gal. 3-5). These two do not mix. One either lives by the deadness of the moral code, by the limitations of his own understanding and moral discipline, or one lives by the spontaneity and power of the Holy Spirit. **The Bible**

does, indeed, present the danger of spiritual counterfeits and deception. It never encourages retreat, however. Rather, it exhorts us to pursue maturity in spiritual judgment and sensitivity, so that we would become spiritual victors, instead of victims (Eph. 4:11-14).

In order to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit, we must first learn to listen. We must get beyond the busy-ness of our own minds and surroundings. We must *train* our faculties “by reason of use” (Heb. 5:14 KJV) to discern between good and evil.

4.) Active obedience. All of the above are without value apart from active choices in response to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. There is a discipline involved in developing a sensitive, hearing heart (1 Kg. 3:9 KJV). The use of the will in the pursuit of prayer (1 Kg. 3:9) and of spiritual instruction is essential. **The Spirit is given to those who obey Him** (Acts 5:32). Only those who walk according to the things of the Spirit will experience the life and peace which He brings (Rom. 8:4-14).

The life-sap of the Vine is meant to produce fruit. It WILL produce fruit. Only by stopping or hindering the life-flow can the branch be unfruitful. Only by no longer abiding in the True Vine will the life-flow cease (Jn. 15:4,5). **Abiding is a process of choice.** It was choice that made our incorporation into the Vine possible, choice that allows us to learn about Him, His ways, and His Spirit, and choice that outwardly expresses the outworking of His indwelling life in growth and fruitfulness. ***There is a delicate partnership here. It is entirely His life, power, and enablement which He places within us, His direction which suggests its proper and individual application in our daily intercourse, ...but it is up to us to give Him His place as the Life-maker, the Teacher, and the Master in order for all the potentialities to become actualities.***

Father, we thank You that the Spirit of life has been poured out within our hearts. Thank You for the unlimited well-spring of life made available through Him. O Precious Lord, we cry out to You for an ever-increasing out-flow of Your life in and through us.

FOR MEDITATION: Luke 11:13; Romans 8:5.

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”

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Truth and Love That Will Get Peoples' Attention

“People are looking at us to see if when we *say* we have truth, it is then possible for this truth not only to take men's souls to Heaven, but to give *all of life* meaning in the *present* time, moment by moment. **They are looking to us to produce something that will bring the world to a standstill -- human beings treating human beings like human beings.**

“There is no use saying you have community or love for each other if it does not get down into the tough stuff of life. It must, or we are producing ugliness in the name of truth. I am convinced that in [this] century people all over the world will *not* listen if we have the right doctrine, the right polity, *but are not exhibiting community.* ...Let me say it very strongly again: **there is no use *talking* about love if it does not relate to the stuff of life in the area of material possessions and needs. If it does not mean a sharing of our material things for others in Christ, it means little or nothing.**”

Adapted from The Church At The End Of The 20th Century by Francis Schaeffer. (Crossway Books: Westchester, IL 60153. 1985) Pp. 71,72. – Italics and bold print added later for emphasis.