

# Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

1789 Iglehart Ave

St. Paul, MN 55104-5215

Ph. (651) 283-0568

## FRUITFULNESS: GOD'S METHODOLOGY

In our previous studies, we have discussed the fact that **we have been appointed by God to bear fruit** (Jn. 15:16). Fruit-bearing is our main calling as His people, and brings glory to God (Jn. 15:8; cf. Isa. 43:7). It does this by manifesting the likeness and beauty of His nature through our lives, by means of the change of character that takes place in us as growing Christians, and by the good works which we are motivated to do because of the Spirit's influence within us. These expressions of transforming life help produce in turn, a third aspect of fruitfulness. They cause our lives to have an impact on those around us, who are drawn to the Christ that they see dwelling within us. Qualitative character change, good works, and the spiritually reproductive influence we have are demonstrated proof that we *are* indeed Jesus' disciples, i.e., we have a vital life-link with the True Vine.

**What is the methodology by which God intends to make us fruitful?** Has He revealed to us any principle that describes what is necessary for fruitfulness to occur? Indeed He has. This methodology is made quite plain in Jn. 15. In vs. 4 and 5, **Jesus states this fundamental principle of fruitfulness in one word: "abide"**. It is easy to see how in English the word "abode" came from the verb "abide". The word "abode" described the place where one habitually stayed, lived in, dwelt, and continued in. The abode was the "abiding place". Similarly, the Greek word, *menō*, means to stay, live in, dwell, or continue in. Our English word, "remain", is a direct derivative of a form of this word.

The principle that Jesus brought out by the use of this word is that **fruitfulness can only occur as we remain, stay, live, and continue in Him**, and as He likewise does so in us (vs.5). Apart from Him, the branch can do nothing. Through this continuing life-link relationship, however, the powerless, impotent branch becomes full of the vigor that produces fruit.

**This same principle is presented consistently throughout the New Testament.** Paul exhorted Timothy to "...continue in the things [he had] learned and become convinced of" (II Tim. 3: 14). In the practical sections of his epistles, Paul's ethical exhortations are always given from the perspective of living consistent with one's status as a new creature in Christ. Thus, we find such exhortations as: "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16,25); "keep standing firm [in liberty]" (Gal. 5:1); "walk in a manner worthy of [your] calling" (Eph. 4:1); "walk no longer as the Gentiles also walk... [since] you laid aside the old self,...and have put on the new self" (Eph. 4:17,22,24); "therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)" (Eph. 5:7-9); "be [being] filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Many other examples from his writings could be cited, especially when longer sections such as Romans 6-8; II Cor. 2:14-7:1; Gal. 3-5; and Col. 1:24-4:6 are examined.

The apostle John also taught the same ideas. A study of his first epistle reveals how thoroughly entrenched this idea of abiding in, or living according to, the Christian's new nature was in his thinking. The book is full of variations of this theme. The apostles James and Peter are not as direct, but they do speak of the outcome of one's life being a test of his genuineness, i.e., whether he is a new creature or not (Jas. 1:18-3:18; I Pet. 1:1-7; II Pet. 2:1-22). They both see the need, furthermore, of attaching themselves to God as their source of strength and hope of victory over self, as well as Satan (Jas. 4:1-10; I Pet. 2:4-9; 5:6-11; II Pet. 1:1-11; 3:18).

The principle of continuing in the relationship you have to God, and in living out what you are as a new creature, is a well established concept throughout the New Testament writings.

**This is *directly opposed* to the idea that we need to earn points with God by good deeds, or the idea of always improving on our life through self-help projects.** The difference is that, **in abiding, we only cultivate and express *what we already have and are*, ...while in self-improvement the focus is on attaining what we do *not* have and becoming what we are *not*.** It may seem, at first glance, to be only a matter of perspective, but it is much more. It is not a mere subtlety of outlook, but it is based upon a fundamental difference that is not only significant, but critical, in regard to our growth and success as fruit-bearing, power-filled Christians. It is a difference that is tantamount to being cut off from the Vine, attempting to produce the Vine's fruit apart from His life, versus continuing to receive and pass along His influence, which is already in us by virtue of the Holy Spirit, and producing His fruit naturally (Gal. 5:1-5; Jn. 15:4,5). It is the difference between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh, and their respective results: life and holiness, or death and decay (Rom. 6:21-23; Gal. 6:7,8).

Father, we thank You that maturity in Christ does *not* come by heroic self-efforts against our fundamentally selfish nature. Progress and growth in the Christian life can never be understood as a monument to our own power to overcome sin. We confess, Father, that the power of sin within us is too deceitful. Even our attempts to control our outward behavior are perverted into pride and self-righteousness. Thus, as Your Word says, such self-discipline is "of no value against fleshly indulgence"(Col. 2:23b).

We praise You, Father, that while we were helplessly bound in this dilemma, You made possible another way. You made Your own pure life available to those who would cast themselves upon Your mercy. Thank You for the wonderful law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus. Teach us what it really means for us.

**FOR MEDITATION: John 15:4,5**

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 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."

.....

**Interdependent Healing Relationships**

"Everyone of us arrives in the Kingdom 'crippled inside'. Living apart from God for years creates inner brokenness which must be mended. In addition, simply living in a fallen world of fallen men continues to damage us as we seek to live under His lordship. The cell group exists as a community where the healing power of God is to manifested...

"When we begin a life together in which all are equipped for ministry, the most effective growth always takes place in an environment where we are called upon to *give* as well as to *receive*, to *heal* as well as *be healed*.

"How does Christ desire us to be healed? Are we to find our healing *independently*, going to Him alone? While that happens, it's not His primary plan for us. Instead, He gives gifts of healings to His Body. Spiritual gifts are related to the Body and its needs... Our Lord could have chosen to minister to each one of us apart from others, but He chose one or more persons to become agents of gifts that would minister to us. This requires participants in the cell group church to use spiritual gifts in all phases of ministry to build up one another."

Where Do We Go From Here? by Ralph Neighbour, Jr., pp. 151,152.