

Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

1789 Iglehart Ave

St. Paul, MN 55104-5215

Ph. (651) 283-0568

FRUITFULNESS: FROM DEATH INTO LIFE

by Dan Trygg

There are examples from nature that are mentioned in Scripture which are helpful in illustrating the death/life aspects of new life in Christ. A meditative examination of them can open up to us rich treasures of insight. These illustrations can help to clarify the necessity for, and the reality of, our death and new life in Christ. By offering us parallels and points of comparison with our own lives, they can help us see the spiritual dynamics of our lives differently, often with a freshness of discovery that will imprint the truth into our hearts with deep impact.

In Jn. 12:24-26, Jesus gave us one of these nature parables. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless **a grain of wheat** falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." Focusing on verse 24, the word picture describes how the fruitfulness of a seed can occur only if it is sown in the ground and buried. Only in this place of death and decay can the hull, or chaff, of the seed deteriorate and be penetrated by life-awakening water, which quickens the life potential within that bare kernel and causes it to grow. **Only by undergoing this process of death can it grow into a viable, fruit-producing plant.** Without death it remains alone. In the end, as the apostle Paul observed, **the plant that grows out of that bare seed looks entirely different from the dead kernel** from which it came (I Cor. 15:36-38). It had not the ability to bear fruit of itself. **It needed another ingredient from outside of itself to enable life** to be manifested. In order for this life to be expressed, furthermore, **the form of its old life had to be cast off.** The new life would not be contained within the boundaries of the old hull. Such limitation would abort any movements of life before they could come to birth from the grave into the light of day.

Jesus applied this parable to those who were seeking to be His followers, and thus be incorporated into the Vine. In order to do so, they must be willing to die to their own lives, i.e., their own plans, thoughts, aspirations, independence, and self-direction (Jn. 12:24,25). They must be willing to count their present life agendas as worth only to be cast off in preference for the eternal life offered to them. **The cost of belonging to Jesus is abandonment from self-seeking, and dedication to Him alone.** This is an active proposition, not a decision isolated from daily life. **It means taking up the cross daily and following Him** (Lk. 9:23; I Cor. 15:31). If we would be His servants, we must follow Him *wherever* He may lead us (Jn. 12:26). **Incorporation into Jesus requires death as the prerequisite before life can be manifested.** Death and decay become, in actuality, ingredients that encourage new life (Cf. II Cor. 4:10,11,16).

Father, we thank You for what has been done. We thank You for the death of the old man accomplished, and the new life begotten, as *facts* which have occurred in Christ. We praise You for the tremendous hope and encouragement which You have made for us. You are so good!

We are also aware that the new life will expand us, stretch us, and lead us in directions we have never been before. We willingly choose to give up the security of the limits of our life experiences up to this point in favor of new growth. Like the shell of the seed, we experience feelings of resistance to change, to the unknown. We choose to *not* be limited by these. Laying aside our fears, our routines, our comfortable life patterns, we choose to give ourselves to discover where the new life of Your Spirit in us will take us.

FOR MEDITATION: John 12:24.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

The Biblical Basis For Small Groups

"Church history bears witness to the power of small groups. Think first of Christ. The idea of the small group serving Kingdom purposes began with Him. He set the pattern.

"Christ drew close to Himself a band of twelve men to build intimacy, along with emotional and spiritual solidarity. This group, though small in number, was meant to provide the beachhead for Christ's invasion into Satan's domain.

"The Gospels portray Christ's repeated interactions with huge, pressing crowds. Many messages were presented to thousands at a time. But this was balanced by meeting with the twelve in private, intimate group settings, and sometimes for extended periods of time.

"This private setting with informal teachings and real sharing provided the best-suited environment for the building and healing of the disciples' minds and relationships, making them into formidable foes against the Kingdom of darkness! And I contend that this holds true for us as well. Christ set a good precedent for us to follow!

"The early church quickly caught onto Christ's strategy. In addition to meeting in large groups to hear the Apostles' teachings, believers also broke down into small cells. In fact, during the first two centuries of the church's life, they met almost exclusively in private homes, not in catacombs as supposed. Acts 2:46 reads, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

[This dynamic continued for several years, until the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). At this point, "a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...". It was no longer safe to meet in the temple in large gatherings. From that time, the small group meeting in private homes was the backbone of the Christian movement.]

"The Greek word *koinonia* depicts the quality of fellowship experienced by the early church. It embodies concepts of communion, deep sharing, and partnership. *Koinonia* took place in large groups, but more effectively in smaller ones in homes. To the Roman Christians, Paul said, 'Greet also the church that meets in their (referring to Priscilla and Aquila) house' (Rom. 16:5)". [In the same chapter, Paul refers indirectly to two other home churches, in verses 14 and 15, by greeting the people he knew and also "the brethren who are with them", or, "the saints who are with them". In verse 23, he sends greetings from "Gaius, host to me (in Corinth) and to the whole church". Again, in Col. 4:15, Paul sends his greetings to "Nympha and the church that is in her house." Philemon also had a church meeting in his home (Philem. 1,2). Many scholars interpret the Apostle John's greeting to "the chosen lady and her children", as well as the concluding phrase, "the children of your chosen sister greet you" as guarded references to churches meeting in homes. If so, the admonition not to receive a false teacher "into your house" certainly takes on a different twist (vs. 10). The church as small groups meeting in private homes was the common New Testament experience.]