

ESF, Lord's day service message
1/18/2015

How To Live a Fruitful Life (Part II)

Remaining in the Vine

John 15:4-8

4Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples

In these 5 verses, Jesus uses the phrase "remain in me" six times. Jesus claims that a key to making our lives fruitful is to remain in Him.

However, in reality, we can do a lot apart from Jesus. We can have a career. We can raise families. We can make lots of money. We can achieve success. We can do all of these things in our own capacity.

Then why does Jesus say that only in Him we can be fruitful? What Jesus means by "fruit" is the fruit of Spirit such as peace, love, kindness, gentleness, joy, self-control. By the fruit Jesus means saved souls who live with hope of eternal life. By the fruit Jesus means righteousness which God approves. Even if you can do many wonderful things, you will never be satisfied and happy without the fruit. But if you produce the fruit you will be satisfied and happy in all circumstances.

If you want to live a fruitful life, you have to remain in Jesus. Then what does it mean to remain in Jesus and how can we remain in Jesus?

Depend on the source of life in Jesus

Branches in a vine do not have power or energy to sustain life. They must remain in the main trunk of a vine to sustain life, to grow and to produce fruit. So, a gardener in a vineyard makes sure that all branches remain connected to the vine.

We do not have the source of life in ourselves. We cannot bear fruit by our own effort. Jesus says, *“apart from me you can do nothing.”* To live a productive life, we have to depend upon God’s life source which is in Christ Jesus.

John 1:3-4 says, *“Through him (Christ) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him (Christ) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”*

We should depend on the source of life in Christ constantly, day by day. Total dependency on Christ should be our daily life pattern and habit. As vine branches must constantly depend on the vine trunk to receive the source of their lives, we must constantly depend on Christ who is the source of our lives.

So, when God wants to make our lives fruitful, He disciplines us to constantly depend on Christ. God trains His children to depend on Him day by day.

To make the Israelites live a fruitful life, God trained them to completely depend on Him in the desert. In the desert where there was nothing but sand and wind, God trained them to depend on Him for their daily needs-food, clothing, shoes, safety, and guidance. God trained them to depend on Him every day for 40 years. When total dependency on God became their pattern of life, God led them to the land of promise and blessed their lives.

That was what the Lord did when He trained Elijah to bear lots of fruit. The Lord told him to go to a remote place and to stay there indefinitely. In that place there was nothing for Elijah to sustain life. He had to depend totally on God's provision every day. After Elijah passed the training, God used him in a mighty way.

If God loves you as His child and wants to make your life fruitful, He will train you to depend on Him daily. He will not give you everything you need at once, but will provide you with just what you need day by day.

When we depend on God, we pray to Him for all our needs. When you learn to completely depend on God through prayer for all your needs, you can live worry free life. You can relax even in the midst of storm. Hudson Taylor once said, *"The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus."*

A retired teacher was giving her little nephew some help with his schoolwork. He was normally a good, attentive child, but on this occasion he could not fix his mind on his work. Suddenly he said, "Aunt Sally, may I kneel down and ask God to help me find my marble?"

She told him to go ahead, the little boy knelt by his chair, closed his eyes, and prayed silently. Then he got up and went on with his lessons contentedly.

The next day, his aunt was almost afraid to ask about the prayer request. She was a little worried that if he did not find the marble that his simple faith would be damaged.

She finally decided to ask anyway and said to him, "Well, dear have you found your marble? " No," was the reply, "but God has made me not want to."

When you are ready to completely depend on the Lord in prayer, He will make your life fruitful.

Have a personal connection with Jesus

To remain in Jesus is to have a personal connection with Jesus. It means to connect ourselves not to Jesus' miracles, not to His visible blessings but to Himself. Our maturity and strength depends on how well we have a personal connection with Jesus. To become more mature and strong, knowing and having Jesus Himself should be everything in our lives.

In Philippians 3:8 Paul says, "...*I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.*"

In the book of John chapter 6, many people followed Jesus when He performed the miracles of multiplying the loaves of bread or healing the sick. But when Jesus stopped performing miracles for them and encouraged them to have a personal connection with Him, most of them left Him. They were following Jesus not to seek Jesus, but to seek things from Jesus.

After most of those people left Jesus, He asked His disciples: *You do not want to leave too, do you?* Then Peter answered: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.* They were following Jesus not because they want to get something from Him but because they believed Jesus as the source of their eternal life. They were following Jesus because of their personal connection with Him. This personal connection with Jesus strengthened their faith. With that personal connection the Lord listened

to their prayers and made their lives fruitful. This is what Jesus promises here; *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”* (verse 7).

The Lord will listen to your prayers and make your life fruitful through your prayers if you keep connecting with Jesus Himself. If you do not see any fruit in your prayer life, examine your motivation for following Him. Are you following Him to seek Him, or are you following Him to gain something from Him?

One day while an American missionary was serving in Paraguay, a Maka Indian named Rafael came to sit on the missionary’s porch. The missionary came out to ask the Indian man what he wanted. The man responded, “Ham, henek met.” Again the missionary asked what he could do for the Indian, but the answer was the same. The missionary did not understand what the Indian meant by that. Later the missionary shared the incident with another local veteran missionary. The veteran missionary explained that it was Rafael’s way of honoring him. He really did not want anything; he just wanted to sit on the missionary’s porch. The Indian tried to find satisfaction and pleasure just by being near the missionary. Finally the missionary understood what the Indian was trying to say: “I do not want anything; I have just come to be near you.”

When you come to Jesus, you need such an attitude as the Paraguay Indian. The Lord will search your motive whenever you come to Him with a question: *“What brings you to me, my child?”* Then you must be able to say: *“Ham, henek met.” “I do not want anything; I have just come to be near you Lord.”*

Keep trusting in Jesus’ grace

Remaining in Jesus means to keep trusting in His grace. Jesus makes His grace sufficient in our lives through trials.

When there is no strong wind blowing at a vine, you do not know which branches of the vine are dead or alive, and which branches are cut off from the vine or attached to the vine. But when there is a strong wind, you can clearly distinguish one from another.

Jesus uses trials and hardship like a strong wind to test our faith and to make us trust in the sufficiency of His grace. James 1:2-4 says, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

Once Paul severely suffered from a thorn in his flesh. He earnestly prayed to the Lord to take the thorn away from him. But the Lord said to Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul’s faith became stronger by trusting in the Lord’s sufficient grace and he was able to overcome the trial.

When we face any kind of trial, we have to take the trial as an opportunity to pray and to trust in the Lord’s sufficient grace.

If we trust in the Lord’s sufficient grace in trials and hardship, He will mold us to be stronger and more mature. As a result we will be able to produce good fruit which we would never have been able to produce by ourselves.

In 1989 an earthquake flattened Armenia, killing 30,000 people in less than 4 minutes. After the tremors stopped a father ran to the elementary school where his son attended. The building was little more than a pile of rubble, but he remembered what he had promised his son, “No matter what happens, I’ll always be there for you.” And driven by that promise he found the area closest to his son’s room and began pulling rocks away.

Other parents came and sobbingly said, “It’s too late. They’re all dead.” But the father refused to give up. For 8 hours, 16 hours, 36 hours he dug. His hands were raw and his energy gone, but he refused to quit. And finally, as he pulled back a large boulder, he heard his son’s cry, “Dad, it’s me.” The boy was with a small group of children who were alive, trapped beneath the rubble. He had told the other children that his dad was going to save him because he had promised to always to be there and that when he saved him, he would save them too (Max Lucado, WHEN CHRIST COMES, Nashville; Word, 1999, PP. 21-22).

Our Lord Jesus is far more faithful than this father. If we endure, He will surely deliver us from all trials and make our lives fruitful.

To always remain in Jesus, we also have to trust in His mercy. To remain in Him, we do not need to be perfect or sinless. Jesus is always merciful. Even if we sin, Jesus always provides a way to be forgiven and gives us a second chance.

Peter was a very unstable man. He made many mistakes while he was following Jesus. But he was still able to live a very fruitful life. Later, in Jerusalem, he led thousands of unbelievers to the salvation of Christ through his preaching. Did he do that because he was a good or noble person? No! He was able to do it only by Christ’s grace and mercy. Although he made lots of mistakes, even sinned, the Lord graciously forgave him and encouraged him to trust in His grace. And Jesus gave him the power to produce lots of fruit. The secret of his fruitful life was that he remained in Christ’s grace. With that experience, Peter encourages all of us to keep trusting in the mercy of the Lord: “*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy*” (1 Peter 2:10).

When you are down and depressed by your sins or mistakes, don't give up. Trust in His grace, His forgiveness, and His unconditional love. And then He will make your life fruitful again.