

Growing in God Pt. 1

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, February 11, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us. Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you like. We have much to cover in a rather short space of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

NOTE 1 – Last Sunday morning we noted that God has called us to be the following: **a)** worshipers; **b)** disciples; **c)** members of the Body of Christ; **d)** servants; and **e)** witnesses (i.e., in a balanced and ever-increasing manner).

Q1. Yet how is the manifold call of God realized?

Q2. How are we to grow in Him and His purposes?

NOTE 2 – It is my desire to spend some time responding to these questions for the next four or five weeks. I want to expose you to select seminal texts and explore key precepts which, when applied, produce sp. growth.

Q. Do you want to grow in the Lord? Do you long for deeper degrees of intimacy, maturity and fruitfulness?

TO THE WORD

KEY 1 – Those who would grow in spiritual intimacy, maturity and fruitfulness must contend with this selection:

John 15:1–8 (NIV)

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [lit. “cleans”] so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean [or “pruned”] because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

KEY 2 – It is absolutely amazing how much Christ conveys in this short selection of scriptural real estate. He offers rich insights through the use of imagery and metaphor (i.e., describing the spiritual via the natural). Thus, those who would fathom the relationship between the Father, the Son and the fruitful believer do well to understand the dynamic between a vinedresser (gardener), his vine, its branch and the fruit thereof in kind!

THE VINE

NOTE 1 – Jesus identifies Himself as and likens Himself unto the “True Vine” in verses 1 and 5. Please consider:

John 15:1 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “I am the true **vine** . . .”

John 15:5 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “I am **vine** . . .”

Q. What is the significance of this imagery?

NOTE 2 – Those who would understand the spiritual applications of this text must begin certain natural realities:

Q. What is the function of an earthly vine (i.e., in relation to a branch and the fruit that is ultimately produced)?

A. The vine provides the necessary sustenance or nutrients to the branch, that it may produce the desired fruit.

NOTE 3 – Thus, the vine is the life-source for the branch. It is the conduit through which life and/or vitality flows!

NOTE 4 – The branch, thusly, occupies a position of supremacy in relation to the branch. The branch needs the vine more than the vine needs the branch! If the branch is cut from the vine, which of the two is more affected?

John 15:4b

4 . . . “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.”

NOTE 5 – Of course, I am not diminishing the value of the branch! It is the branch which manifests wanted fruit, but of this we must be clear: the branch is reliant upon the vine for survival in a way that the vine is simply not.

Q. What is Christ seeking to communicate through such imagery?

A1. Christ is our life-source. He is the conduit of life abundant and eternal, without whom we would surely die:

John 3:16 (Emphasis Mine)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have **eternal** life.

John 10:10 (Emphasis Mine)

10 “I have come that they may have life, and have it **to the full**”

A2. Christ is our life-source. He is the conduit of all that we need in order to bring forth the desired fruit of God:

2 Corinthians 5:17b (NKJV)

17 . . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Galatians 2:20 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, **but Christ lives in me**. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

A3. The believer needs Christ more than He needs the believer. Should we be separated, who is more affected?

Q. What happens if the branch is severed from the vine?

A. The vine loses a conduit through which fruit may be produced, but the “severed” branch suffers a worse fate:

John 15:6 (Emphasis Mine)

6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is **thrown away** and **withers**; such branches are picked up, **thrown into the fire and burned**.

NOTE 6 – Before we move on, let us note that Christ is not one vine among many. He is the true (i.e., only) vine:

John 15:1 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “I am the **true** vine . . .”

Acts 4:12

12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

THE BRANCH

NOTE 1 – As we move along in the imagery, Christ identifies and likens the believer to branches in this selection:

John 15:5 (Emphasis Mine)

5 “I am the vine; **you are the branches**.”

Q. What is the significance of this imagery?

NOTE 2 – Those who would understand the spiritual applications of this text must begin certain natural realities:

Q. What is the function of the branch (i.e., in relation to the vine and the fruit which is ultimately produced)?

A. The branch exists to bear fruit (i.e., born of the provision of the vine and in sync w/ the desire of the gardener).

NOTE 3 – Life is truly in the vine, but that life works itself out and manifests in the fruit produced by the branch. Without the branch, the life of the vine cannot be expressed and the longing of the gardener cannot be fulfilled. Thus, though the vine is not dependent upon the branch for survival, its glories cannot be shown apart from it!

Q. What is the obligation of the branch in relation to the vine?

A. The branch must abide or remain in the vine (i.e., connection).

NOTE 4 – Note that the branch must maintain intimate and vital union with the vine in order to live or bear fruit. Should its connection with the branch become fractured or diseased, it will NOT bear fruit (i.e., leading to loss).

John 15:4 (Emphasis Mine)

4 . . . No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must **remain** in the vine.

Q. What is Christ seeking to communicate through such imagery?

A1. The believer exists to bear spiritual fruit (i.e., the fruit of the Holy Spirit):

Galatians 5:22–23 (Emphasis Mine)

22 But the **fruit** of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

A2. The life of Christ Jesus is expressed and made manifest in and through His people.

A3. Though Christ is not dependent upon us, His glory will not be shown apart from us.

Ephesians 2:4b–5b, 6–7 (Emphasis Mine)

4 . . . because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions . . . 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, **7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.**

A4. The only way for the believer to bear fruit is to remain connected w/ or abide in Christ. This speaks to union:

John 15:4

4 Remain in me, as I also 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.

Q. What can we produce apart from the Lord (re: pleasing fruit)?

John 15:5 (Emphasis Mine)

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; **apart from me you can do nothing.**

NOTE 5 – Christ warns against failing to abide:

John 15:5–6 (Emphasis Mine)

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 **If you do not remain in me**, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”

NOTE 6 – When our connection w/ Christ becomes fractured or diseased due to sin, we run real risk. Take heed!

THE VINEDRESSER

NOTE 1 – As we move along in the imagery, Christ identifies and likens God the Father to an earthly vinedresser:

John 15:1 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “I am the true vine, **and my Father is the gardener [i.e., vinedresser or husbandman].**”

NOTE 2 – Those who would understand the spiritual applications of this text must begin certain natural realities:

Q. What is the relationship of the gardener (i.e., in relation to the vine, the branch and the fruit of the vine)?

A. The gardener is often owner of the vineyard and all that it produces. Every aspect belongs to and is for Him!

Q. What does the vinedresser desire?

A. Fruit (i.e., a bountiful yield for the investment of time, energy and effort)!

Q. What is the function of a vinedresser (i.e., in relation to the vine, the branch and the deeply desired fruit)?

A. An earthly vinedresser cultivates, tends to and prunes the branches (i.e., that pleasing fruit might come forth).

NOTE 3 – A vinedresser works diligently to accomplish their goals. It is not easy, but requires expertise and love!

Q. How is this desire brought forth? What is the work of the vinedresser (i.e., practically)?

A1. He removes dead, unfruitful branches. Such branches breed insects or disease and threaten other branches.

A2. He prunes and/or clean fruitful branches that they might become more fruitful. Consider this in. quotation:

QUOTE – “Without the pruning process of the vinedresser, the fruit-bearing potential of the vineyard and each individual branch would not be realized. Without this process, unattended branches would be choked out by dead wood and ridden with insects and disease. Thus, pruning is necessary, beneficial, and could be construed as an act of love.”

NOTE 4 – An earthly vinedresser utilizes an array of tools necessary for the pruning of the branches of the vine!

Q. What is Christ seeking to communicate through such imagery?

A1. God the Father reigns over all things, and all things exist under His own/dominion (operating per His desires).

A2. God the Father both desires and is glorified by the fruit that we produce in Christ Jesus (i.e., fruit of the HS):

John 15:8 (Emphasis Mine)

8 This is to **my Father’s glory**, that you **bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

A3. The Father sovereignly works to remove dead, unfruitful branches (as such breed sp. ruination and disease):

John 15:1b–2a, 6 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “. . . my Father is the gardener. 2 **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit** . . . 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

FYI – This passage raises questions and has some potentially frightening implications, yet this passage remains!

A4. God the Father prunes fruitful believers so that we might become even more fruitful. Consider this selection:

John 15:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, **while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.**

NOTE 5 – The pruning process of God is quite painful at times. The cutting away of hindering elements often is! It can hurt as God cuts away at our hopes, perspectives, intentions, dreams, attitudes, actions, words, habits, relationships and more. Yet apart from the work and expert care of the Lord, you and I will never become fruitful.

QUOTE – “Without the pruning process of the Father, we will never reach our fruit-bearing potential (corporately or individually). We will also be ridden with spiritual baggage, sinful habits and the consequences thereof, choking out life abundant.”

NOTE 6 – It is beyond the scope of our time this morning, but God our Father has many “tools” at his disposal!

Q. What tools might the Lord use to prune His people? (LET THEM TALK)

SUMMATIONS

Q. Do you wish to grow in the Lord?

- 1) You Must Learn to Abide in Christ, the Son of God
- 2) You Must Surrender to the Pruning Work of the Father

John 15:1–8 (NIV)

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [lit. “cleans”] so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean [or “pruned”] because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org.

NOTE 2 – Check out our website for any of our beyond Sunday ministries (MM, WM & CYC).

2 Corinthians 13:14

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.