

First Be Fruitful, Then Multiply
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 2/5/23

We are in a sermon series called Transitions for Growth. I was working on a sermon for today, but God gave me a different direction during our Growing with Grace small group last week. So, I'm preaching a message entitled First Be Fruitful, Then Multiply!

It's based on a very important biblical principle found all the way back at the beginning when God gave Adam and Eve His instructions for life. Genesis 1:26-28 says:

God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

We see several truths here:

God created man – man did not just evolve by chance.

God created two genders – male and female.

It's interesting that the Bible says God made man and God created man.

These words are different and they are both important.

God said, "Let us make man in our image." The Hebrew word for "make" means "to form from something else; to fashion. Literally – to squeeze like a potter does with clay.

The Hebrew word for "create" means to make something out of nothing. So man is the integration of parts that were created out of nothing and parts that were created out of something. We see this in Genesis 2:7

The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

God took something He had already made – dirt – and combined it with something unmade – His Spirit – and man became a living soul. That makes us spirit, soul and body. The Bible says God created us in His image. This is not talking about physical likeness, but the fact that we are spiritual beings.

After God made man, God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion.

God's original purposes for mankind were: Be fruitful – multiply - fill the Earth - subdue it - have dominion. TO SUBDUED means to conquer, to make subservient, to dominate. I like the way the Amplified Bible says it -

Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it (using all its vast resources in the service of God and man).

TO HAVE DOMINION means to take over and rule over. To prevail against. God created us to have dominion on this earth. We are not to dominate people, but the resources of the earth. God has also given us dominion over Satan and his demons.

With all of that as our background what I want to talk about today is being fruitful and multiplying. I always thought that the commands to be fruitful and multiply were basically saying the same thing. But I've come to learn that they are not exactly the same and they have more to do than with just procreation. Literally, this passage is talking about having children. However, this principle is also about our productivity in life.

If we are going to transition for growth, we must first be fruitful, then multiply.
 TO BE FRUITFUL - means to bear fruit. To have results from your work.
 TO MULTIPLY - means to increase greatly. To have abundance. To make greater or larger. To become numerous.

We all need this principle at work in our lives: You must be fruitful *before* you multiply. You must get the order in sequence: First be fruitful, *THEN* multiply. People sometimes make the mistake of believing that expansion will lead to profitability. However, that is rarely true.

There's an old joke about the store owner who said he was losing money on every item he sold, but he would make it up in volume. He was totally wrong because if you lose money on everything you sell, the more you sell, the more you lose.

In most cases, expansion does not cure unprofitability, it increases it! First – we need to become fruitful or profitable – then we can expand.
 You must grow a tree before you grow a forest.
 You must grow an apple before you grow an orchard.
 You must grow a disciple before you grow a church.
 You must grow a productive employee before you grow a business.

Think back again to having children - you must be fruitful – or able to bear fruit – before you can multiply. Sterile man and barren women are not fruitful; therefore they cannot multiply. By the way, neither can same-sex couples. This is one of the reasons we do not believe in same sex marriage. God created marriage for a man and woman and He uniquely designed them to be fruitful and multiply. Malachi 2:15 says:

God made husbands and wives to become one body and one spirit for His purpose — so they would have children who are true to God.

God's purpose for us is to be fruitful, then multiply.

What does all of this have to do with our lives? Our work? Our business? In every area of life we must first be fruitful, then multiply. Don't reverse the order.

If you multiply before you are fruitful, you multiply unfruitfulness.

If you multiply before you are functional, you multiply dysfunction.

If you multiply before everything is in order, you multiply disorder.

If you multiply before you are profitable, you multiply unprofitability.

If you multiply before you are mature, you multiply immaturity.

If you multiply before you are healthy, you multiply unhealthiness.

Let me give you an example of multiplying without being fruitful. When the Affordable Healthcare Act was passed, the government spent over \$600 million on the website: Healthcare.gov. It took over 3 years to build. A website of that magnitude usually requires 4-6 months of testing. This website was only tested for 4-6 days!

As a result – an unfruitful website was rolled out and multiplied to the whole nation. It was a huge failure and it cast a huge doubt on the Affordable Care Act. After all – if the government cannot even make a healthcare website work, how can they make healthcare work? They would just be multiplying unfruitfulness. And that's what happened.

When I worked for Family Christian Stores, we tested every change at multiple levels. We had a model store in the home office.

Computer upgrades were first tested there to be sure they worked.

If they worked, then the updates were tested in one real store.

If they worked there, they were tested in a group of stores.

If they worked there – if they were fruitful – then and only then were they multiplied and rolled out to the entire chain.

There are people who want to launch a chain of retail stores without first opening one store! This is foolishness! You must first see that one store is fruitful before you multiply. If that one store loses money – you would not want to multiply a loser. You would want to fix it until it is fruitful before you multiply it.

I'll give you another example from the church world. Multi-site churches are big right now. These are mega churches who have satellite campuses in several locations.

I heard of a local mega church that wanted to get in on this multi-site movement. So they raised some money and opened up two other campuses in the metroplex. Unfortunately – neither of those are doing well and they have consolidated the two into one. They should have done one and got all the bugs out and had it working smoothly before they tried to multiply. Failing to do so caused them to multiply unfruitfulness.

That's why there is an important biblical principle we need to live by:
Don't despise small beginnings!

The pattern of God's kingdom starts as a seed. Christianity started small. Jesus chose 12 disciples and poured Himself into them so that they would bear fruit. When He left earth there were 120 people in the Upper Room praying for the Holy Spirit. Later God multiplied the church greatly. But it started small. It became fruitful before it multiplied.

When the Children of Israel possessed the Promised Land, it started small. They didn't take the whole land at once. God told them in Exodus 23:29-31

I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you.

But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

When Zerubbabel began the task of rebuilding the temple, God told him in Zechariah 4:10

Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin...

Americans seem to be impatient when it comes to growing businesses or ministries or churches. Don't despise small beginnings or you may multiply unfruitfulness.

Be aware that the fruitful stage can be messy. That's why many people quit in the early small stages of a journey.

We need to realize that the fruitful time is the time to observe, evaluate and adjust. It's the time to make mistakes and learn from them. It's the time to test and try different approaches to see what works best. If you don't deal with your bad habits when you are small, you will only multiply bad habits.

Let's talk about this at the church level and the personal level.

Before we can lead others, we must first lead ourselves.

Before we can manage others, we must first manage ourselves.

Before we can help others be fruitful, we must first be fruitful ourselves.

That's why not just anyone can teach or lead in a church. We don't look for perfect people, because there aren't any. But we do look for fruitful people – so we don't multiply unfruitfulness. We look for a level of maturity – so we don't multiply immaturity. We look for faithfulness – so we don't multiply unfaithfulness.

This is why 1 Timothy 5:22 says:

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily.

That's not talking about praying for people. It's talking about ordaining people for ministry. The New Living Translation says:

Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader.

It's because of the impact leaders have on others. That's why James 3:1 says:

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Why are they judged more strictly? Because of their impact on others. Luke 6:40 says:

A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

You teach what you know – you reproduce who you are! That's why you need to be fruitful before you multiply.

That's why it's so important in family life that you work on changing yourself before trying to change your spouse and kids! No matter what you say – they are watching your life. They are examining the fruit. And sometimes the way we live is shouting so loud that people can't hear the words we say!

What kind of fruit is being produced in your life? Here's how to know - life has a way of squeezing us, and when we are squeezed, our fruit is either sweet or bitter. What comes out of you when the squeeze is on?

What we need is the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. These fruit are found in Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Many people emphasize the gifts of the Spirit and neglect the fruit. But both are necessary. The difference between them is this - gifts are given – fruit is grown.

The gifts of the spirit are manifestations of God's power; the fruit of the spirit are manifestations of God's character. The gifts of the spirit show what God does; the fruit of the spirit show who God is and who we are becoming. Our part is to receive the gifts and grow the fruit.

All the fruit of the spirit can be seen in the character of God and lived out in the life of Christ. We know that the Holy Spirit at work in our lives when we become increasingly more like Christ in our character and actions.

Our spouse needs a Christ-like husband or wife.

Our children need Christ-like parents. It's an eye-opening day as a parent to realize that your children are becoming like you and the fruit is not so good! There's a weight of responsibility that falls on you to get it right.

But we can never become Christ-like apart from the fruit of the Spirit. So how is this fruit produced in our lives? Is it by man's effort? Not at all.

Just as the branch derives all its life and nourishment from the vine, so the believer in Christ derives his strength from the True Vine, and is able to bear fruit.

I remember a time when Deb and I were biking through an orange grove. We didn't hear the orange trees huffing and puffing, grunting and groaning, as they worked at trying to produce oranges. The oranges were not a product of self-effort, but a product of the life that was in the tree.

Likewise, spiritual fruit is a product of the life that is in us. You cannot work up this fruit on your own. So, how is fruit grown? The Holy Spirit produces this fruit of the spirit. In John 15:1-8 – Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, 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, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Notice branches can bear no fruit, some fruit, more fruit or much fruit.

In this passage, Jesus shows us three keys to fruitfulness:
Abiding in the word, Abiding in Christ and abiding in prayer.

To abide means to stay in a certain place. To live there.
We need to stay in the word, stay in prayer and stay in our position in Christ.
Abiding in the word of the Lord is a key to fruitfulness.
Are you in the word and is the word in you?
Without the word of God, there will be no fruit.

Abiding in Christ is a key to fruitfulness.
The Christian has been placed in Christ; that is his position.

Christ Himself is the vine; believers are vine branches.
The branch can only bear fruit as it abides in the vine.

The only way believers can bear the fruit of a Christ-like character is by living in touch with Christ moment by moment. As we maintain constant contact with Him, we are conscious of Him abiding in us and supplying us with spiritual strength. It is not a question of the branch living its life for the Vine, but simply of letting the life of the Vine flow out through the branches. Without Christ, we can do nothing.

A vine branch has one great purpose—to bear fruit.
It is useless for making furniture or for building homes.
It does not even make good firewood.
But it is good for fruit bearing—as long as it abides in the vine.
Psalm 92:12-15 says:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, “The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him.”

Notice how fruitfulness is tied to being planted. We need to be planted, rooted and grounded in God and His family.

The third key to bearing fruit is asking.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

James says we have not because we ask not. We need to abide in Christ, let his word abide in us and abide in prayer – then He will make us fruitful.

So, I ask you - what kind of fruit is obvious in your life?
Are you asking God for fruit? Are you abiding in Christ and His word?
Are you planted in the house of the Lord?

To make transitions for growth you must first be fruitful... then multiply.
If you're lost, get saved.
If you're saved, then grow in Christ.
If you're growing in Christ, then be fruitful.
If you are fruitful, then multiply!
Multiply new believers, multiply disciples, multiply character in your life and family, multiply results at work, and little by little – from faith to faith – from grace to grace - you will possess the land of your promise!

Be fruitful and then multiply and you will fulfill God's destiny for your life!