

What Fruit are you Cultivating?
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC - 2-12-23

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of being part of our Grace Groups on Wednesday nights. People are learning and being disciplined and building relationships.

And these groups are already impacting you because they are impacting me! We are in a series call Transitioning for Growth and God keeps using the Grace Groups to give me direction in preaching.

I told you last week was working on a sermon, but God gave me a different direction during our Growing with Grace small group. Breanna asked a question and as I answered the Lord dropped into my heart to preach a message entitled First Be Fruitful, Then Multiply!

I didn't really get to finish preaching that sermon because as I preached last week, I felt an anointing when I briefly mentioned generational curses and I felt led to speak on that today. But then we had Grace Groups this week. Our group leader Trey O'Neal got deeper into the fruit of the Spirit than I did in the sermon because I left it out to cover other material.

But I felt led to change my sermon again and today I'm preaching a message entitled What Fruit are you Cultivating? Hopefully, we'll get to deal with generational curses next week.

So I ask you – What Fruit are you cultivating in your life? And what fruit are you cultivating in your family, your work and ministry?

Last week we taught on what God told us about His original intent for human beings. Genesis 1:26-27 says:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

We see here that we were created to reflect the image of God.

We were created for the presence of God.

God created us to have dominion and to rule and reign in life.

God created us to be fruitful and multiply.

God created us to work.

Genesis 2:15 says:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Get this: The first thing God gave man was His image.
 The first place God put man was in His presence.
 The first thing God told man was to work.

And those three things should be priorities to you:
 Being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ
 Spending time in the presence of God
 Working as unto the Lord and not man
 You should be actively cultivating these things in your life!

By the way, God gave man work before the fall into sin. Work is not part of the curse – it is part of God’s purpose for your life! Your work is determined by the way God created you and the place God placed you. Adam was created by God to cultivate the ground and he was placed in the Garden of Eden.

There is something God created you to do! The key to success in life is finding our God-given purpose and gifts and then taking dominion in that area.
 When you find that – you become a person of purpose.
 When you do your work well as unto the Lord – you become successful!

By the way – God gave man work before He gave Him a woman. That’s why men usually get their worth from work, not from a woman. This can be dangerous because it’s easy for a man to put his work before his family. That’s why men must work at making family a priority.

Ideally a man should find his work before he finds his woman. When Eve met Adam he was already in Eden – in the presence of God - and he was already working. When your woman meets you – you should be living in God’s presence and you should be working in God’s calling and gifting for your life!

There are two other purposes for God creating man found in Genesis 2:15.
 The Good News Translation says:

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it.

Cultivate is different than work. Remember – a job is just something you do to make money. Your work is what you are created by God and called by God to do. And when you are working in your calling – you will cultivate. To cultivate is to grow something – build something – develop something.

When you cultivate something – it becomes better than it was: More fruitful – more effective – When you cultivate something – it produces more than it did before. This principle of cultivation can be seen in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 says:

A man who was going on a journey called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to

another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Evidently God takes us cultivating what He gives us very seriously.
He is not satisfied with us just maintaining what He gives us.
He expects us to cultivate it so that it increases.
He expects to get back more than He gives.

This shows you how to get blessed and promoted. Cultivate!
This also shows you how to get into trouble with God: do nothing!
God expects you to cultivate, grow, increase and improve.

If you are still doing the same thing you were doing 10 years ago with no improvement – something's wrong!

God's purpose for you is that you cultivate everything around you!
Cultivate your business. Cultivate your family. Cultivate your children.
You should be building your spouse and children up, not tearing them down.
You should help them discover their talents and gifts and help them develop them to their full potential. Your goal is to help them become all that God created them to be.
Your goal should not be to hold them back, but to help them advance.

God created you to cultivate. And the first thing you need to cultivate is yourself! What is your plan for personal growth and self-improvement? What books are you reading? What seminars are you attending? Who's mentoring you for growth?

You should always be becoming – The New and Improved Version of you!
You should have improved this year over last year. And next year you should have improved over this year. But that will not just happen all on its own.

With God's help - you've got to make it happen. But it all starts in your mind.
To become a cultivator – you must change the way you think.
You must begin to think like a success, not a failure.
You must begin to think like a leader, not a follower.
You must begin to think in terms of increase, not decrease.

Just as you must be fruitful before you multiply – you must cultivate yourself before you can cultivate others. You must be a disciple before you can disciple others. And your first priority in cultivating must be your family and your church family.

Our spouse needs a Christ-like husband or wife.
Our children need Christ-like parents.
Listen, we are all cultivating some kind of fruit in ourselves and in others.

Last week, I felt I touched a nerve when I talked about what it's like as a parent to realize that your children are becoming like you and the fruit is not so good! Actually, we are constantly producing some kind of fruit in others – either fruit of the spirit or fruit of ourselves. Galatians 5:16-25 deals with this.

Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The flesh wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the flesh desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, quarreling, jealousies, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their flesh to His cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

We have all produced fruit from both of these lists, but our goal is to stop producing any fruit from our flesh and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. This is key to our upcoming teaching on generational curses because generational curses come from producing the fruit of the flesh and multiplying it in our

children, but generational blessings come from cultivating the fruit of the spirit and multiplying that in our children.

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 our effort? Not really.

Let me say it this way, it is a joint effort between us and the Holy Spirit. We are co-laborers with Him and when we walk in the Spirit we will cultivate the fruit of the spirit rather than the works of the flesh.

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. And it starts with us abiding in Christ and walking in 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. And 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 constant contact with Christ and drawing life from Him. 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 being cultivated 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?

We get some insight about cultivating in a little known parable found in Luke 13:6-9.

Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "Sir,' the man replied, 'Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

We are the gardeners, but the Lord owns the garden and He expects fruit. If He doesn't find any – He wants us to cut down the tree.

Notice what the gardener said – Let me dig and let me fertilize.
The purpose of digging is to remove some things – what things?

The things that impede growth – like rocks and weeds.

The purpose of fertilizer is to add some things – what things?

The things that aid growth.

In our church – one of our responsibilities as elders is to remove the things that hinder growth and add the things that add growth.

We spend our lives digging, fertilizing and cutting down trees.

That means change. That means we must be catalysts for change.

That means we need to take a hard look at every ministry in our church and ask the hard question:

Are they bearing fruit?

Or are the same people doing the same things year after year – going through the motions – but not bearing fruit.

In the parable – after a certain time – God expected fruit.

If there was no fruit – He said cut it down.

And it's the same in our personal lives.

We need to plant seeds then water and fertilize.

Then there are things we need to add and things to take out, and there are things to cut out of our lives.

That is what cultivating is all about.

You will never Transition to Growth until you cultivate!

You'll never cultivate until you start thinking like a cultivator!

You'll never become a leader until you start thinking like a leader.

You'll never become a boss until you start thinking like a boss.

As a man thinks in his heart... so is he.

So start renewing your mind with the word of God and cultivate yourself so that you can fulfill God's purpose and cultivate everything around you!

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 by cultivating!

Multiply new believers, multiply disciples, cultivate character in your life and family, cultivate results at work, and little by little – from faith to faith – from grace to grace – from glory to glory - you will possess the land of your promise!

Become a cultivator of fruit and you will fulfill God's destiny for your life!