

Developing a Culture of Discipleship Week 4 “The Vine and the Trellis”

I was pleasantly surprised when we purchased our home to discover that on the edge of our property there was a grape vine. I love grapes and I looked forward to enjoying the fruit of my new back yard for years to come.

- I learned from a neighbor that one of the previous owners actually filled the entire yard with grape vines. And during the prohibition, Mr Panfile produced wine in a wine press that remains in my basement even today.
- I am told, at one time there were so many grapes in the yard that you couldn't see any grass. The trellis was completely covered with lush and tasty fruit.
- However, by the time that we purchased the property there was only one vine left in the yard and it hadn't been taken care of in years.
- After a year or so, my neighbor spread pesticide around his house, which happened to be close to the vine. Within a few weeks the vine died and all I was left with only a trellis. Bear pipes with no life and no fruit.
- What good is a trellis without a vine? You can't grow fruit, and you can't make wine from rusty metal poles.
- In order for a trellis to possess any real value or purpose, it must be supporting something that is ALIVE. Why am I telling you this?
- Because WE are the branches and HE is the Vine and He has called us to follow Him and produce good fruit!

Last year I read a book titled, “The Trellis and the Vine” and I became convinced that we needed to focus our attention in 2018 on developing the life of the vine rather than perfecting the structure of the trellis.

As we seek to develop a culture of Discipleship here at Harvest, we don't plan on adding more activities, building more boards or creating more committees.

- That would simply be adding to the trellis rather than growing the vine.
- Don't get me wrong, every vine needs a trellis. Activities, Boards and Committees can help to support the life of the vine.
- BUT they are Structural rather than Spiritual, Organizational rather than Organic, they are Functional rather than Fruitful.
- If we intend on bearing good fruit for the glory of God we need to focus our attention on the life and health of the Vine.

In today's culture where Pastors are under pressure to function as C.E.O's rather than Shepherds, Trellis work is all the rage. Developing programs that will draw a crowd have become the focus of ministry seminars. It seems that an impressive trellis is more important in today's society than a healthy vine. Flashy youth ministries, elements of

entertainment in the place of worship, Financial Freedom seminars aimed at building the tithe are all parts of the Trellis.

We can build a trellis that will reach the heavens, in the hope of making a name for ourselves. But I would much rather spend my time feeding and caring for the vine.

To focus our attention on growing a healthy vine is to preach the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and see people converted to Christ.

- To grow the vine we must make disciples of all nations.
- We must study the Word of God together and seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ.
- To grow the vine we must pray and worship the Lord together with joy.
- We seek to walk in love and obedience to the one who gave himself for us.

And Friends, we can all be involved in the glorious work of growing the Vine.

- We can read the Word of God with our spouse and disciple our children.
- We can reach beyond the walls of our homes and commit to read devotional material with friends; we can even discuss it over facetime or Skype.
- I know one man who invites a dozen men to his home for dinner and devotions once a month. There are many creative ways to grow the Vine by building discipling relationships.

This morning I would like to complete our topical study on discipleship by carefully inspecting three different vines. We will consider:

- The Corrupt vine
- The True vine
- The Fruitful vine.

Let's begin in the Old Testament where God compares the Nation of Israel to a Vine

In Psalm 80, Asaph sings of Israel who is God's precious vine:

Psalm 80:8 **You (That is God) brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. 11 It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.**

- Think about it, the first thing that you do when planting a garden is prepare the soil. You till up the ground, remove all of the rocks and pull all of the weeds, so that the vine has room to grow and develop a healthy system of roots.
- Well, when God brought His chosen people, His precious vine out of the land of Egypt He uprooted long established and powerful nations including the oaks of Bashan and the Palm trees of Jericho in order to establish His vine.

- God planted His vine securely in the land that He promised to Abraham. He made every provision for their wellbeing and the vine grew deep roots and covered the land. From the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

The Prophet Isaiah likewise sings of the planting of God's chosen vine, BUT half-way through the song the tune begins to change.

Isaiah 5:1 **Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.**

- It doesn't take long for this joyful song of the vine to turn into a sad lament. Despite God's tender care and gracious provision, something very strange happened; the Vine of Israel somehow produced "Wild Grapes."
- Despite the many advantages, that God graciously provided His people the fruit of the vine is described as "Wild" (Literally) corrupt, rotten, stinky.
- In light of this corrupt fruit, Isaiah calls for a witness, someone who can testify to God's faithfulness concerning his vine.

Isaiah 5:3 **And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?**

- God's provision for his people was obvious. He destroyed Pharaoh before their eyes. He led them through the wilderness, faithfully supplying food and water despite their grumbling.
- He led them in battle and miraculously gave them victory over all of their enemies. What more could God have done?
- And Yet throughout the O.T. the words of the Prophets make up a chorus of lament concerning the degenerate fruit of the Vine.

Jeremiah 2: 21 **I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?**

- Chosen by God from among all of the nations of the earth, delivered from bondage in Egypt, miraculously brought through the Red Sea, led by the Lord Himself into the Land of Promise.
- Given the revelation of God in Holy Scriptures, Called to be holy as God is holy and yet unable to abide by the Law of God.
- There at Sinai, they stood before the Lord and confessed that they would do all that God called them to do in his holy Law.
 - And yet, because of their unbelief, because they remained unregenerate, their hearts still tied to Egypt, they continually produced corrupt fruit.
 - In perfect justice, God disciplined his people. He removed them from the land as He declared by the Prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 5: 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

- Is that it? Was God finished with His Vine? How Could He?
- He couldn't be! He promised Abraham that His descendants would be like the stars of heaven, like the sands of the shore.
- He promised to raise up a seed who would bless all the families of the earth.

Jeremiah foretold the coming of the Faithful Branch, a True Vine that would bear good fruit. This is the Seed of Abraham, the Root and branch of Jesse, the righteous branch.

Jeremiah 23: 5 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. *(There's the Fruit)* 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

- That brings us to our Second Point, The True Vine

This True Vine, this righteous branch, the King who executes justice and reigns in righteousness is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself.

John 15:1, Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

- When Jesus calls himself the "True Vine" he is saying that Israel served as a type or a shadow that pointed to the reality of Christ.
- He is the fulfillment, the true vine, the fruitful source of all life.

I think it is interesting to consider the timing and the possible surroundings when Jesus spoke these words. *(some of this is merely conjecture on my part)*

- John 15 is part of the narrative describing the night that Jesus was betrayed.
- He was with his disciples in the upper room. He introduced the Lord's Supper as the fulfillment of the Passover Feast and pointed to the New Covenant that He would establish in His own blood.
- They leave the Upper Room and walk toward to the Garden of Gethsemane. On their way they pass by the Temple. (Herod's Temple)

Josephus (Jewish Historian) tells us that the entrance to Herod's Temple in Jerusalem was adorned with a Golden Vine representing the Nation of Israel.

I like to think that the Disciples were standing within sight of that Golden Vine when Jesus said these words:

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

- The Nation of Israel served as a shadow, a type that was designed to point us to Christ who is the True Vine. The source and giver of eternal life.
- Listen to the Words of the Lord Jesus:

John 5:26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

1 John 5: 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

It is through His perfect life, his atoning death and His glorious resurrection that He makes it possible for repentant sinners to enter into fellowship with God and receive eternal life. In this way, Jesus is the True vine, the only source of spiritual life.

- As the True Vine Jesus promised to indwell all who believe, to make his home in us, and he promised to be with us till the end of the age as we go and make disciples of all nations. (John 14:20, 23, 17:22-23, 26, Matthew 28:20)
- This day-to-day fellowship with Christ is described in John 15 as Abiding, Residing or remaining in Him. In the same way that a branch abides in life giving union with the vine. (So we abide in Christ)

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Theologian Louis Berkhof defines a believer's union with Christ as,
"That intimate, vital and spiritual union between Christ and His people, by virtue of which, He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation."

My friends it is this spiritual union with Christ that enables us to bear good fruit and that brings us to our final point: The Fruitful Vine.

John 15:5, Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- Jesus went on to say:

John 15: 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Bearing fruit is seen here as the natural result of abiding or remaining in the vine. This natural fruitfulness is simply the out-forming of the life that flows from the vine of Christ into every believing branch.

There are a number of Scriptures that we could point to that would describe the fruit of a life that is connected to the vine, (Gal. 5 Fruit of the Spirit) but this morning I would like to draw your attention to the Book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 5: 8 **for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light** 9 **(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),**

- AT one time you were darkness, HE did NOT say you were IN the darkness but rather, YOU WERE darkness.
 - In your depravity, you were spiritually and morally dark. Ignorant of the truth of God and morally corrupt.
- BUT NOW, having been redeemed you are LIGHT in the Lord.
 - By virtue of your connection with Christ, your abiding in the Vine, YOU are now Light. “Light” describes your New Nature, you are a New Creature. Spiritually, Mentally and Morally Illuminated.
- And Paul commands you to WALK, to LIVE your life as children of Light.
 - As children of Light you now bear fruit, fruit that is described as Good, and right and true.
- Because He is the True Vine, the Fruit of your life is good and right and true. This is His nature, His Spirit, His character now seen in US.

NOW that we have established the Theology behind the Vine, Lets consider HOW Developing a Culture of Discipleship can help to produce good fruit in our lives.

I would like you to think about the CHURCH as a Green House that is uniquely designed to produce good fruit.

Every once in a while Sharon and I will take a walk through Ott’s Greenhouse in Schwenksville.

- My favorite room is the Tropical Room where you can see Lemons, Oranges and Bananas growing, even in the middle of winter.
- How can that be? Well the Greenhouse provides the perfect environment, the right temperature, the proper humidity in order to grow tropical plants.

My friends, I believe that the church should provide the right atmosphere where relationships between believers can grow and develop good fruit.

- Love and Humility, Honesty and Accountability, Grace and Truth, Justice and Mercy, Discipline and forgiveness... All these are the good fruit of the Vine.

Listen as Paul instructs Titus on how to develop these relationships in the church.

Titus 2: 1 **But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.** 2 **Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.** 3

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,
4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.

- The FIRST component described by Paul in this Greenhouse of discipleship is Teaching. But not just any teaching. All churches teach. BUT a healthy church that produces good fruit teaches Sound Doctrine.
- NEXT I want you to notice the multi-generational discipling relationships that Titus is instructed to develop.
 - Older men, specifically those who bear good fruit are to teach what is good.
 - Older women (who bear good fruit) are to train the younger women to love their husbands and children and to produce good fruit.
 - WHERE do YOU fit in this description? (Mature? Young? Growing?)

NOW take note of the specific fruit that is developed in this Greenhouse of Discipleship where multiple generations work together to bear good fruit for the glory of God.

- Sober-minded, (*Temperate, not drunkards*) Dignified - Respected
- Self-controlled – Not driven by fleshly passions
- Sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness.
- Purity, kindness
- Hard working, submissive This is Good Fruit.

The fruit described by Paul serves as evidence that a branch is connected to the Vine. Evidence that the light of Christ is shining forth from a body of believers.

- As David declared:

Ps 145:4 **One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.**

- Intergenerational discipleship in the church provide an atmosphere for growth like a greenhouse, an incubator for healthy growth.

Sharon read an article to me this week that she found on Facebook.

A young couple named Angela and Michael Bakker were excited when they found out they were pregnant with their first child.

- Their Joy quickly turned to FEAR when their daughter Naomi came into the world 15 weeks early weighing only 12 ounces.
- After two weeks in the incubator Angela and Michael were allowed to hold their one pound little girl for the very first time.
- Now Naomi's doctor believed that skin to skin contact was the best thing for babies who are born premature so every day for 128 days Naomi would spend a couple of hours laying on her mommy and daddy's chest.
- It took 20 weeks but Angela and Michael finally took little Naomi home.

Friends I believe that person to person contact in loving Christian relationships function like an incubator developing strong, healthy, fruitful Believers.

Where do we go from here:

1. Leadership Training this year will be focused on developing a culture of Discipleship here at Harvest.
2. The Elders will be personally discipling prospective leaders.
3. We will be asking those in leadership training to then turn around and begin discipling their spouses, their children and others within the church.

What is the Goal? I was challenged to come up with a vision statement.

Colossians 1: 28 **Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**