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## The Good Heart Grows in Clean Soil



**Part 35** (041003am)

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How far down the road of life have you walked? Most Americans die at about 75 years old. Are you halfway or more through a normal lifetime yet?

How much of last week was deposited in Heaven? How much of your time and energies were used by the Lord for His purposes and for His glory? We make deposits in the bank of Heaven by allowing God to control our time, our talents, our attitudes, and our actions.

His control produces fruit. That control is called walking in the Spirit or abiding in Christ. Abiding is a choice we make. God commands us to abide twice in John 15. We make daily, hourly, and moment-by-moment choices whether or not to obey.

Fruit is when we grab moments of time flowing past in that 60-minute -per-hour river we live with, and in the power of God use them for His glory. Then we have something left from those evaporating drops of time that God says we can redeem and deposit into the Bank of Heaven.

So how is your account in Heaven? Do you have a plan to make regular and systematic deposits? This morning as we look again at the call to us that Jesus makes to abide in Him throughout our lifetime on earth - I want to look at a new angle. How are those of us past the halfway point of life, those of us on the other side of the hill - how are we doing?

The statistics of our country go like this:

- Populations USA: 294,420,164 (as of 10.2.04)
- Average life expectancy is: 74.4 (males) and 79.8 (females).

This morning do some math in your heart and mind. Think of yourself as a statistic for just a moment. Figure how far you MAY have from today to the finish line. It is amazing to look at the official figures from our last census. There were exactly half of all Americans less than 39 years old, and the rest over 39. So men and women, boys and girls - your half way point is about 39 years of age. Can I talk very directly to all of us here that are more than halfway to the end?

- 16% of us are 35/44 years old; that means that if you are over 37.2 years old men you have passed the half way point, or 39.9 for women. **What are you doing to maximize your deposits in Heaven?**
- 13.4 % of us are 45/54 years old; that means one out of every eight people in this land are 45/54 years old and they have less than half their life left on earth at the most. **What are you doing to maximize your deposits in Heaven?**
- 8.6 % of us are 55/64 years old; according to statistical studies one out of every twelve of us in America have a good ten to twenty years at the most left to live - and not all of that may be in health and mobility. **What are you doing to maximize your deposits in Heaven?**
- 6.5 % of us are 65/74 years old; one out of every 16 people in the USA are in the last lap of life, they have less than 10 years to invest in Heaven. Much of that may possibly be spent in the doctor's office, waiting rooms, rehab centers, and retirement homes. **What are you doing to maximize your deposits in Heaven?**
- 4.4 % of us are 75/84 years old; that means you have passed the average lifespan of folks around you. God has allowed you a lifetime already, you are in bonus time. **Are you maximizing your time for Him?**
- 1.5% of us are 85+ years on earth! Wow, if you are past the mid-eighties you are facing eternity AT ANY MOMENT. You are a heartbeat away, a breath away from the gates of Glory. **Live every one of your moments for Him, you will be seeing Him soon, face to face!**

Open now with me to [John 15:2](#), where Jesus says that all He rates us on in life is that one word FRUIT. Look how He classifies every believer as either fruitful or non-fruitful. If we are fruitful He wants to encourage us to further fruit. If we are non-fruitful right now He is going to intervene.

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v. 2 "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.

Do you realize that when you and I were saved we enlisted God Himself as our personal, lifelong gardener? With pruning clippers in hand He is ALWAYS at work! When we are fruitful, God moves in to make us "more fruitful".

Do you know who God has targeted as the most fruitful branches in His vineyard? The mature branches. In grape farming the branches reach their peak producing years amazingly – at the same age that we as humans pass the halfway point. **Grapes are most productive at their 40 th year of growth! So from our ½ way point onward SO SHOULD WE!** The question is how? That takes us to a study of fruit bearing that God gives us in **Psalm 92:12-15**.

**Jesus wants me to increase in fruit bearing every growing season of my life – so He will work on me to that end!**

Psalm 92:12-15 NKJV

12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, **(that means to grow in the harsh conditions, dry and desert places of life);**

He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. **(that means they grow through storms and strong climate changes)**

13 Those who are planted in the house of the Lord **(a place of obedient worship, praise, ministry, and sacrifice)**

Shall flourish in the courts of our God. **(that means in God's Presence)**

14 They shall still bear fruit in old age: **(that means life long, to the end – fruitfulness)**

They shall be fresh and flourishing, **(that means life long and to the end freshness and overflowing lives of godliness)**

15 To declare that the Lord is upright: **(His way is the Right Way)**

He is my rock, **(His Presence is a place of Complete Security and Peace)**

and there is no unrighteousness in Him. **(He is GOOD in whatever He DOES)**

Read and pray.

God wants mature saints bearing attitudes that glorify Him, actions that magnify Him, treasures that are at His disposal, and time that is His to use. That is exactly what Psalm 92 says. Matured saints, or those who are "older" in the faith have so many blessing from the Lord.

**Matured saints** have deep roots, they have weathered the storms, they have experienced painful losses, they know how brief life can be.

**Matured saints** know that security only can be found in Christ's Presence, where reside the precious trio of peace, comfort, and joy. Do you remember some of those **matured saints** that God points out in His Word?

- Anna who fasted and prayed at nearly 100 years of age, and was still growing.
- Simeon who was still praising and serving at an elderly time in life.
- Zacharias and Elisabeth who were involved in ministry and got the opportunity to grow old tired as they raised a son in their old age.
- Aged Saint John the Apostle was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day – he had never grown tired of Sundays in the Presence of the Lord!
- Caleb took on great challenges in his last days to honor the Lord.
- Joshua made one of the most powerful statements about grand parenting as in Joshua 24.10 he stated that as for me and my house. He was still exerting great influence over his children and grandchildren for the Lord.
- Daniel was having in depth Bible studies, all night prayer meetings, and carrying on a public ministry for the Lord at age 80!

These beautiful and life-sustaining trees are mentioned in Psalm 92, (which in the Jewish reading plan set out by Ezra for the synagogues is the psalm for reading on every Sabbath day). "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree..." (v. 12)

God says that the picture of a righteous person or saint that He wants us to learn from is the similarities between the characteristics of a "palm tree" and how those can be compared to habits that righteous people also choose to cultivate. Here is the 1 st fact about palm trees.

- **The palm tree grows in good clean soil** . When you find these beautiful fruit-bearing trees in California, Iraq, Jericho, or anywhere else, you will never find them planted or growing among rocks or worthless soil.

Because Jesus Christ is our righteousness, and His grace has brought righteousness to us, which we receive by faith, we are those declared righteous. And God's Word instructs us from cover to cover that we will grow only in the clean soil of the Bible, of good books, and by keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.

**Are you growing in clean soil? Have you chosen willfully what Daniel chose in Daniel 1.8? That choice is the first step in growing into a mature and fruitful saint. Open there with me.**

Have you purposed in your heart that you will not defile yourself – with a bad movie, a bad TV show, a bad magazine, a bad place of amusement or recreation, a bad relationship, a bad attitude, a bad habit? If not maybe today is the day that you will do so.

David who was singing to God in worship Psalms right up to the end of his 70 years left us the pathway he had followed to live a godly life. Look over there with me to Psalm 101.

[Psalm 101:1-8 NKJV](#)

1 I will sing of mercy and justice: To You, O Lord, I will sing praises. 2 I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. **(Note his PERSONAL INTEGRITY)**

3 I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away;

It shall not cling to me. **(Note his PACT OF PURITY)**

4 A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness. **(Note his PERSONAL ABSTINENCE FROM EVIL EXPOSURE)**

5 Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure. 6 My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, That they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way,

He shall serve me. **(Note his CHOICE OF PROPER HEROES)**

7 He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. **(Like certain TV shows, DVDs, books, etc?)** 8 Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, That I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord. **(Note his CHOICE to PURGE HIS LIFE)**

- **The palm tree grows from the inside out** . An oak tree can be rotten and dead in the inside, but it will still be very much alive on the outside. We all remember our childhood days, when we would play and hide in an old oak tree. But it is not so with the palm tree. If it is rotten on the inside, it will die.

The life of the righteous is not determined or conditioned by outward appearances, ritual or circumstance. It all comes from within. Solomon calls us to this truth, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." ([Proverbs 4:23](#))

The Lord's words to the prophet Samuel are still profitable to us today: "...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (I [Samuel 16:7](#))

Our life in Christ is not made up of a lot of externalities, of rules and regulations. The Lord Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." ([Matthew 12:35](#))

What is really going on inside of you? Is it the garden of God? Do you have the fruit of the Spirit maturing and overflowing out of your life more and more as the days go by?

- **The palm tree grows no branches** . To be sure, there are the fronds at the top but no branches. In other words, it spends no time on side issues.

Jesus said that if we stay focused He will flood our lives. [Matthew 6:22-23](#) "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! NKJV

Paul said he limited his choices in life in [Philippians 3:13](#), "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; **but one thing I do**, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, (NKJV)

David said the same thing in [Psalm 73:25](#), "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. (NKJV)

Remember God wants our complete focus to act on our behalf. [Deuteronomy 4:29](#) But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. NKJV And later God says these penetrating words in [2 Chronicles 16:9](#), "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him..." NKJV

- **All of the fruit of the palm tree is at the top** . In other words, everything for God! This is the ambition of the righteous. Personal endeavor and achievement, social activity and serving mankind, will have the underlying motive of glorifying the God adored by the righteous.

"The "single eye" is a rare item, but when it is found among the Lord's people, it is a gem of highest value and price. Desert nomads would be the first to inform us that the palm tree grows where it is needed. When the children of Israel reached Elim, they were lured to the twelve wells of water in the desert by the sight of the seventy palm trees. The Lord Jesus, in His great high priestly prayer in John 17, pointed out that His children are: out of the world, not of the world, but are in the world, and have been sent into the world. We are planted in this moral and spiritual desert in order that we may be signals to the hungry and thirsty that there is satisfaction to be found in the One who has redeemed us".

**Matured saints** reaching Psalm 92 life have learned: How useless self pity is; how dangerous selfishness becomes; how worthless greed ends up; how hopeless independence can be; how restless discontentment can be; how empty pleasures become so quickly.

On the positive side **matured saints** have learned how priceless real friends truly become; how endless Christ's joys can be; how numerous ministry opportunities are all around us; how satisfying Christ's presence becomes the more we are alone; how comforting prayer grows to be in our lives.

What areas does our Heavenly Father the Gardener need to work on in our lives? Remember what He wants to reward -- Attitudes, Actions, Time and Treasure? Those are the very areas He prunes and Chastens. Pruning is positive (when we cooperate) and Chastening is negative (when we resist).

Here are some **attitudes** that steal fruit and rob us of rewards:

- Beware of **the problem of exceptionism**: it makes me think my life is an exception to God's Word. Thus I can excuse myself from doing anything for Heaven because of my past, or my pain, or my poverty, or my poor self-image. The problem of exceptionism can erase Christ's well done. Remember Ananias and Saphira.
- God resists us when we maintain an assumption of our own superiority, or when we constantly think that we are more right than anyone else. God will not tolerate any habits we maintain of building up ourselves by tearing others down.
- God has to convict us of our constant impulses to prove and promote ourselves. Just as He must resist our tendency to take credit for things that were really the ideas or the work of others.
- His Spirit is grieved at the ease with which we hold a grudge over slights that we've been guilty of committing ourselves.
- God will always stand against our uncanny ability to rationalize, justify, and excuse what we do and say while at the same time, and even over the same issues, being unsympathetic and judgmental with others.
- God is at war against all **the unmortified pockets of pride in our lives**. What do pockets of pride look like? They are when I am proud of my intellect, or proud of my achievements, or proud of my giftedness, or even proud of my goodness. Pockets of pride in my life can erase Christ's well done. Remember Lot who was righteous yet lost it all because he thought he could stand and he fell into sin.

Here are some **actions** that steal fruit and rob us of rewards:

- God will not allow us to persist in the enticing **sins of old age**: a lust for comfort and convenience, a greed for recognition and a covetousness for security. The sins of old age can erase Christ's well done. Remember Solomon who started well and failed in the end because he refused to obey God at the end of his life.
- Actions God warns us to deal with are when we say that we need to stay in control because we're so shy and sensitive.
- God says it is sin when we won't give Him complete control because we fear our marriage partner would take advantage of our submission.
- God will not overlook any moral laxity even if we say we have unusual sexual desires and God's rules are too restrictive.
- It is inexcusable when we try to say that security and comfort have always been big issues with us so we can't risk having God take away our support system.
- We risk reward loss when we try to tell God that our children need our full attention, and God can have our life after we get them raised.
- We risk reward by failing to discipline our flesh by arguing we like to eat, and we can understand why the Israelites complained about the manna. We fear that if we gave my appetite to God, our life would be boring.
- Or we excuse bad behavior by claiming that in order to "reach my friends" I have to be with them doing the things they enjoy.

Here are some **uses of our time** that steal fruit and rob us of rewards that all relate to **Unhealthy FearS**:

- **Fear of Pain**, Fear of Abandonment or Rejection, Fear of Death, Fear of Losing Control, Fear of Failure, Fear of the Future, Fear of Shame and Embarrassment, Fear of Strangers, Fear of Loss, Fear of What People Think of You, Fear of Aging.
- **HOW DOES GOD DELIVER US FROM FEAR?** With Greater Fear! Fear of God. **WHAT IS THE FEAR OF THE LORD?** This list is distilled from references to the fear of the Lord that appear throughout Psalms.
  - Reverence and respect for God as the all-powerful Leader of all else.
  - Certainty of inescapable accountability for behavior to God
  - Practicing the presence of a Holy God
  - Humbly following His leadership by obeying His Word.

My Desires need to become His Desires; My Pleasure needs need to get surrendered to His Pleasures planned for me "at His right Hand (Psalm 16.11); My Happiness is supplied by His Happiness welling up within me by His Spirit (Romans 5.1); My Ownership of anything gets swallowed up by His Ownership of everything (1 st Corinthians 6.19-20); My Control over my life and body is yielded over to His Control (Romans 12.1-2); then My Success is flowing from the Word Filled Life that produces His Success (Joshua 1.8).

v. 2f "Every Our Father the Vinedresser is here. He is looking at us.

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.

- If we are cast down in the mud of sin **He chastens us** and spiritually lifts us back up into the sunlight of fellowship.
- If we are flourishing with external growth but not producing much fruit (by giving, sowing and reaping, spirit walking, flesh denying and so on...as we saw last time) **He prunes us** by cutting away at our rambling growth until we bear more fruit.

It is the wise farmer who knows the correct times of the year to cultivate and prune his vines to insure maximum yield. In the Holy Land grapevines first bloom in May, and the fruit will begin to ripen by August. There are two calculated **prunings** (as noted in the Gezer Calendar) in the fall before the vines become dormant, the unproductive bunches from the previous year are removed, and at the

peak growth time of the year once the grapes appear, excess leaves and tendrils are cut away to encourage greater yield and even ripening. In our lives we also need to be trimmed when things get in the way and when things are going better than ever! Yahweh will thus bide His time until the appropriate moment to make His pruning in our lives.

"Does God have a grudge against His children? Is He trying to "get even" with us? Is God's chastening and pruning a kind of parental revenge for childish wrongdoing? Often we may think so, but this is far from the truth. God disciplines us for our own profit so we can share in His holiness. God's one supreme purpose in disciplining us is purification. He wants to take away from us all that mars the likeness of Jesus Christ within us. It is His own holiness that He wants to perfect in us".

**PROFILES IN PRUNING** In the vineyard, an expert pruner applies his skills in four specific ways:

1. Farmers cut anything dead or dying off the vines.
2. Farmers try to expose every branch to the light so that it get maximum exposure to the sunlight.
3. Farmers prune unnecessary growth so that the vine concentrates on fruit production.
4. Farmers keep the soil around the roots clear and prepared to feed the fruit production needs of the plant..

When He chastens we are "lifted"; when He cleans we are "purged"; and when He communes we "abide".

"Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The Greek word is *kathairo*, which means "to cleanse." Some people consider the purging to be pruning, and He does that too, but it really means to cleanse.

#### **FRUITBEARING 101: Jesus Never Neglects Any Vine That He Owns**

If you are in Christ He is at work somewhere in your life – trimming, lifting, cleaning, or pruning. Whenever we have fruitless times, God steps in to change that.

"For the Christian, sin is like dirt covering the grape leaves. Air and light can't get in. The branch languishes, and no fruit develops. How does our Vinedresser lift us from mud and misery? How does He move our branch from barren to beautiful so we can start filling up our basket? The answer to this question is the first secret of the vine. It's All Up To You, Once believers understand God's motive in discipline, an astonishing truth dawns: **The discipline doesn't have to continue! It's all up to me. I will only experience pain as long as I hang on to my sin.** If you're still wondering whether you are in a season of discipline, ask yourself this question: **Can I look back over my walk with God and see very clearly that a sinful behavior I used to be caught up in is no longer an issue? Are there thoughts, attitudes, or habits that used to dominate my life but don't anymore?** If you can't, your grape harvest basket is probably empty and you are undoubtedly being disciplined. I recommend that you now try to understand what degree of discipline God might be using to get your attention. Note Hebrews 12 with me. There are stages of God's chastening in a believer's life."

1. **Stage 1: Rebuke – "My son, do not...be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him"** (v.5). We hear God's rebuke, even though we don't always choose to respond. God can make Himself heard in many ways: a prick of our conscience, a timely word from another person, a Scripture, the preaching of God's Word, or conviction by the Holy Spirit. (Do you see how wonderful and kind it is of God to use so many methods to get our attention and steer us away from peril?)
1. **Stage 2: Chasten – "For whom the Lord loves He chastens"** (v. 5). In other places in the Bible, the word **chastening** is used interchangeably with discipline. But in our text we find a specific use that shows a more serious degree of discipline. Chastening is something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy now doesn't. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finance. Many Christians bump along in this level of discipline, yet fail to read the signs. They feel unfulfilled at church, critical of their Christian friends, and "on the outs" with God. When they pick up their Bible, it feels like a lead weight instead of a welcome relief. Their relationship with the Lord seems blighted by a sadness or lethargy they can't quite trace. If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you don't need to go to church more or try to read your Bible with a better attitude. You need to look for ongoing sin in your life, the dirt crusting over your leaves and cutting you off from God's best. If you don't respond, love will compel your Father to take more drastic measures.
1. **Stage 3: Scourge- "And scourges every son whom He receives"** (v. 6). To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It's the same word the Gospels use to describe what the Romans did to Jesus just before they crucified Him. Not a pretty picture! In fact, for the word **scourge** you could substitute **cause-excruciating pain**. What percentage of Christians do you think have experienced scourging? It may shock you to read that God scourges "every son." That means you have most likely already been scourge in your life.

Let me share a few insights from a grape arbor. That is what we called ours at home as I grew up in Michigan. We cultivated grapes for my mother's incredible grape jams, jellies, and juice.

- But we had learned the hard way about the mischievous nature of the rambling, rapid growing grape vines! In every way we are like those vines. Why? **The biggest enemy of the grape is itself. Grapes love to grow and expand their territory.**
- In fact they love to do everything but bear fruit, they must be pruned to do that! We are so much like the grape vine's tendency to grow so vigorously in every direction!
  
- We, like those vines, have a lot of non-fruitful wood that must be cut away each year. We, like the grapevines, can become so dense in all our external leaf productions (ministry, work, family, athletics, amusements, investments, busyness, stress, anxieties, sins, etc.) that the sun (like the Son of God) cannot reach into the area **where fruit should form.**
- We, left to ourselves, are just like a grape plant: we will always favor new expansion of our territory over more grapes (fruit for God).
- **What is the spiritual result?** From a distance our lives look like incredibly green and healthy branches full of luxurious growth, and of impressive achievements. But to the Lord who stands up close, we have an under-whelming harvest of God glorifying eternal fruit!

Are you ready for a troubling truth that, once grasped, will free you to view the trials you're now facing in a new light? Even change how you feel about them and reward you with a beautiful harvest for God?

Because of the grape's tendency to grow so vigorously, a lot of wood must be cut away each year. Grapevines can become so dense that the sun cannot reach into the area where fruit should form. Left to itself, a grape plant will always favor new growth over more grapes. The result? From a distance, luxurious growth, an impressive achievement. Up close, an under-whelming harvest.

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Adapted from Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me: Experience The Loving Leadership of Jesus*, (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1996, Pages 191-192.

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