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Fruitfulness Explained: Growing



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What does God the Father want from each of us believers this morning? Lifelong growth in abiding fruitfully in Jesus.

- When your body stops growing—your abiding fruitfully should not.
- When your financial worth stops growing-- your abiding fruitfully should not.
- When your power and influence on earth stop growing-- your abiding fruitfully should not.
- When your accomplishments in your field stop growing-- your abiding fruitfully should not.

See what I mean? There is a part of you that will never die and should always grow. That concept should be on your mind every day you live on this planet. Life long growing in fruitfulness, abiding in Jesus Christ!

Probably every one of us in this room have heard the famous words of Charles Thomas Studd (1860-1931),

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

However, few of us realize when it was that he said those words. It was on his deathbed with his precious family gathered around him. He had already told each of his children that he wished he had something to give to them, but he had nothing left. Then he said, "I gave it all to the Lord, a long time ago."

This spiritual giant actually gave his children more than anyone could imagine. His children had seen their father grow year by year in the Lord. They saw his personal devotion to the Word of God. They watched him refined by constant health problems, reoccurring weakness and bouts with intense pain. They had watched his tireless devotion to the Lord that carried their frail dad to the remotest and most dangerous spots on earth—all to share the glorious Gospel of Christ. In the end, every one of his children served the Lord to their last days. They saw and followed the example of his great dedication to God.

When Avis B. Christiansen (1895-1985), the wife of the Vice President of Moody Bible Institute heard these precious words spoken by C.T. Studd at his death, she began to ponder them. A few years later in 1937, she wrote a now famous hymn, "**Only One Life to Offer**". Listen to her reflections that turned into a prayer of devotion to the Lord she also served with all her heart (hymn # 378):

Only one life to offer--
Jesus, my Lord and King;
Only one tongue to praise Thee
And of Thy mercy sing;
Only one heart's devotion--
Savior, O may it be
Consecrated alone to Thy matchless glory,
Yielded fully to Thee.

Only this hour is mine, Lord--
May it be used for Thee;
May ev'ry passing moment
Count for eternity;
Souls all about are dying,
Dying in sin and shame;
Help me bring the message of Calv'ry's redemption
In Thy glorious name.

	Treasures
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Part: 4	Christ's Finished Work
Part: 3	The Message of Jesus
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Part: 1	The Gospel Presentation in Acts 1

Only one life to offer--
Take it, dear Lord, I pray;
Nothing from Thee withholding,
Thy will I now obey;
Thou who hast freely given
Thine all in all for me,
Claim this life for Thine own to be used, my Saviour,
Ev'ry moment for Thee.

Growing in Christ is accomplished by abiding in Him. Allowing Him to chasten (spank us as needed) and prune us (guide our lives away) from anything that we will have to leave behind because it was not worth Christ's dying for. What are you living for today that is worthy of the price paid for your life? Are you living for what Christ died for?

To set the tone for this morning's study open with me to [2 Corinthians 5:9-15](#)

- [2 Corinthians 5:9-15](#) Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. 12 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, **that those who live should live no longer for themselves**, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "Well you can't take it with you!" That is true. God no less says the same thing. But so many have tried. Most notably we think of the god-kings of Egypt. Those Pharaohs built giant banks (known as pyramids) to house their fabulous wealth so they could "take it with them." Now empty and looted they stand as silent witnesses to the folly of trying to hold onto this earth.

Perhaps the contrast between the last hours of life in two vastly different men will help us see how great are God's rewards!

The first man was the incredibly wealthy, last king of Assyria (in what is today Iran). Ancient sources give a remarkably clear picture of the destruction of Nineveh. There had been rebellions in the empire for some time. The armies of Nineveh supported by her allies repulsed many of them. But in the year 612 B.C. the doom of the city arrived. Combined armies of Babylonians and Scythians marched up the left bank of the Tigris River and surrounded the city. It happened in early spring at the time of the annual rainfalls. Since the rains were especially hard that year, the Tigris and other rivers flooded and apparently washed away a portion of the walls, leaving a breach for the armies to enter the city.

The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (c. 20 B.C.) says that the river not only broke down the walls of the city, it also inundated part of it. At this point, the king, Sardanapalus, remembering an oracle to the effect that Nineveh would only fall when the river itself declared war against it, believed that the oracle was fulfilled and abandoned any hope of saving himself. He built a gigantic funeral pyre in the royal precincts, heaped up large quantities of gold and costly clothes, shut his concubines and eunuchs in a chamber he had made in the midst of the pyre, and then burned himself, his family, his concubines and eunuchs, and the palace. For centuries the wealth of the ancient world had been pouring into Nineveh as a result of the Assyrian conquests. Now it burned!

The second man was neither wealthy nor a king. We have already met him, his name was CT Studd. After serving 15 years in China and six in India, he invested his final 21 in the heart of Africa's vast, dark jungles among the fierce, cannibal, head-hunting pygmies.

CT Studd, a former lean and fit athlete, is now gaunt and emaciated. All his gleaming white teeth are now either broken, brown, or long gone. Stooped, halting with each step he is surrounded by thousands of glistening black bodies wearing banana leaves. They have come to hear their beloved Bwana for the last time. He speaks to them only after over two hours of singing the songs he had so lovingly taught them: "Wounded for me, wounded for me, there on the cross He was wounded for me, gone my transgressions and now I can sing, all because Jesus was wounded for me!"

There in front of him sit 5,000 former headhunters. Now their oiled bodies, formerly the habitation of dark, foul fiends from the pit are temples of the Living God. Once naked and grossly immoral lovers of darkness, now not only clothed in Christ but also modestly clothed in banana leaves. Before their beloved father in the faith, they sit in an immense sea of white-toothed smiles. With faces turned heavenward, they sing of the sweet by and by and that beautiful shore they will someday see.

Passed now are the years of darkness and savagery. The former enemies sit shoulder to shoulder. No weapons of war are left, only the bond of love. This would be the last sight of his dear saintly converts Studd would see. After his message uttered between gasps for air, with every ear strained to catch each word, he is carried back to his hut. Exhausted, he rests, though only his Savior knew it was his last message. In the night the Faithful Shepherd who had led him to China, then India and finally to the very heart of Africa - took CT home. In the morning only the shriveled earthly tent was left. But around that hut and to the furthest reaches of the jungles and on mission stations around the world, the footprints of this giant can be found today.

CT Studd gave every thing to Christ. And in return he lost nothing. Sardanapalus kept everything to the end and died as it was destroyed. Jim Elliot summed it up the

best, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." This morning let's find what we can give up that will last forever!

How do we grow to such a life that reflects Christ, bears fruit, and leaves nothing behind in life that was wasted? We remember that God has two choices, and we participate in His work of making us fruitful.

He can **prune us**. Pruning is a positive step of refocusing, redirecting, and renewing that makes us healthier, and more fruitful.

Or He can **chasten us**. Chastening is a negative step of drastic intervention taken by God to prevent us from further damaging ourselves by sinful choices we have made in our lives.

Our Father the Vinedresser is looking at us. 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 His control of our time, our talents, our attitudes, and our actions) **He prunes us** by cutting away at our rambling growth until we bear more fruit.

TRUTH NUMBER 1: 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? Note Hebrews 12 with me. There are stages of God's chastening in a believer's life."

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?)

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 Hebrews 12 it is used in a much 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.

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 scourged in your life.

TRUTH NUMBER 2: Jesus Wants My Desires to Become His Desires

What is the Lord trying to accomplish by this pruning/cleansing and chastening/scourging? It is actually quite simple. Our Father in Heaven wants my desires to become His desires. So how do I get Him in control and me out of the driver's seat of life? Here are some simple but powerful items to sign over to Him at closing.

1. **My desires need to become His desires . Luke 22:42** saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." NKJV
2. **My pleasure needs get surrendered to His pleasures planned for me "at His right Hand". Psalm 16:11** You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. NKJV
3. **My happiness is supplied by His happiness welling up within me by His Spirit. Romans 5:1-5** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. NKJV
4. **My ownership of anything gets swallowed up by His ownership of everything. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. NKJV
5. **My control over my life and body is yielded over to His control. Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. NKJV
6. **My success begins flowing from the Word Filled Life that produces His**

success. Joshua 1:8-9 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Remember precious words spoken by C.T. Studd at his death?

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past;

only what's done for Christ will last."

Give Him what He died for—your life, your all!

Only one life to offer--
Jesus, my Lord and King;
Only one tongue to praise Thee
And of Thy mercy sing;
Only one heart's devotion--
Savior, O may it be
Consecrated alone to Thy matchless glory,
Yielded fully to Thee.

Only this hour is mine, Lord--
May it be used for Thee;
May ev'ry passing moment
Count for eternity;
Souls all about are dying,
Dying in sin and shame;
Help me bring the message of Calv'ry's redemption
In Thy glorious name.

Only one life to offer--
Take it, dear Lord, I pray;
Nothing from Thee withholding,
Thy will I now obey;
Thou who hast freely given
Thine all in all for me,
Claim this life for Thine own to be used, my Saviour,
Ev'ry moment for Thee.

Growing in Christ is accomplished by abiding in Him. Allowing Him to chasten (spank us as needed) and prune us (guide our lives away) from anything that we will have to leave behind because it was not worth Christ's dying for. What are you living for today that is worthy of the price paid for your life? Are you living for what Christ died for?

Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of The Vine*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 39-48.

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