

Fruitful Branches

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on [Bear Fruit](#) by Michael Forney
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Opening Conversation

Think of places in the Bible where fruit is mentioned. In your group see how many you can name and then discuss the fruit's significance within the passage of Scripture. Write them here:

What did you find? Were there any recurring themes as to the significance of fruit in the Scripture? What were they?

In this study, [Bear Fruit](#) by Michael Forney will help us further explore the significance of understanding what it means to be a fruitful disciple of Jesus Christ. Let's begin.

Bear Fruit

By Michael Forney

For much of my life, I have lived and pastored in areas known for their fruit. Orchards and vineyards dominated the landscape, and the community organized around the annual cycles of pruning, planting, spraying, irrigating, protecting, picking and packing fruit. Occasionally, I would help parishioners and work in the orchards gathering and burning pruned branches or culled trees or picking fruit in the harvest.

With this background in my mind, I can imagine Jesus gathered with His disciples over the Passover dinner in the Upper Room after having traveled to Jerusalem walking by vineyards and orchards. In this Last Supper before His betrayal and crucifixion, drawing from the recent background of their journey, Jesus gives His disciples this command:

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father” (John 15:5–8 NLT).

Jesus is setting the expectation of fruitfulness with His disciples with an intensity that conveys the importance of fruitfulness to the Father. Four compelling implications from these verses shape our understanding of fruitfulness and multiplication.

Jesus said, “For apart from me you can do nothing.” Consider for a moment that people who don’t know Jesus do many things with their lives. What things might Jesus be referring to when He says that, apart from Him, we can do nothing?

Michael writes, “Jesus is setting the expectation of fruitfulness with His disciples with an *intensity* that conveys the *importance* of fruitfulness to the Father.” Discuss the following words in the context of that sentence.

1. Expectation.

2. Intensity.

3. Importance.

How do you see bearing fruit for the kingdom of God differently through the lens of expectation, intensity and importance?

Fruitfulness is a product of connection.

Jesus illustrates clearly that fruitfulness results from Him through us as we stay connected in Him. The vine provides the nutrients to the branches to bear fruit. He makes clear that fruitfulness is not born from our competency or independent actions. It is not a result of our ingenuity or efforts. It stems from and depends on our connection to Jesus — from our willingness to submit to and cooperate with His

presence and purpose in our lives. While this sounds like we are off the hook because the results rest in Jesus, we are tasked with a difficult and essential role in the process.

We must align ourselves with Jesus and connect into Him. This is simple, but not easy. It requires intentional daily connection with Jesus and submission to His

leadership and work in our lives. It is not a passive act, but is one of leaning into Jesus, listening to His voice, and seeking His presence. He says the result of

such connection is “much fruit.” Spiritual leadership and fruitfulness require connection with Jesus. We cannot produce spiritual fruit on our own.

Michael reminds us the individual competence, ingenuity, and actions are not what cause fruitfulness. So, what does?

If we can do nothing apart from Jesus, what fruit should we see as a natural byproduct of remaining in Him? What can we do? What should we do through remaining in Jesus?

Fruitfulness is partnership with Christ.

It doesn't stop with connection but extends to cooperation. Fruit comes in partnership with Jesus. The vine provides the necessary ingredients, but the branches must receive them and put them to work toward bearing fruit. This is not an automatic outcome. Healthy branches use the nutrients to both grow and produce fruit. Some branches use all nutrients to nurture themselves, and, though they appear healthy and growing, they don't produce fruit because they are hoarding the nutrients for themselves. Other branches reject the nutrients all together and wither away. The branches must cooperate with the vine to produce fruit.

We must understand the intent and working of Jesus in us and around us to produce fruit. We cannot do it on our own. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Conversely, the vine doesn't produce fruit except through its branches. We must partner with Jesus

and submit to His leadership to produce fruit. While connecting is an internal practice, cooperating is an external practice that extends fruit from the branch into the world. We are fruitful when we are actively engaging with Jesus externally in the opportunities He gives us to partner with Him in His redemptive work in the hearts of the people around us. This requires awareness of what Jesus is desiring to do through us.

Cultivating prayerful expectancy and spiritual awareness of opportunity helps us to cooperate with Jesus. When we don't know what to do, we can ask and Jesus answers that prayer and gives us direction. This kind of spiritual practice is like all other spiritual practices. It takes intentional and repeated cultivation of these skills to gain proficiency.

Read Luke 13:6–9. What does it mean to be a Christian who “uses up the soil”?

What are the spiritual nutrients we receive from Jesus? What are we *supposed* to do with them?

Michael points out that we need to cultivate “prayerful expectancy and spiritual awareness.” Are your prayers mostly offered as supplication – asking God to intervene in some kind of negative circumstance? What might a prayer sound like that is rooted in expectancy and a desire to use His nutrients well? How do those two prayers differ?

Fruitfulness is an essential marker of health.

Sometimes branches don't pull the nutrients from the vine or they break away from the vine. These branches are easily identified as unhealthy and are cut away. Less obvious are branches that consume the nutrients but do not produce fruit.

In my role of oversight, I often hear leaders talk about an intention to multiply disciples, leaders and churches “after we get healthy.” This notion seems noble and right. After all, we reproduce after our own kind and reproducing unhealth is not the goal. While this sounds good, it is a false premise. Branches that use all the nutrients provided by the vines for their own growth and benefit do not produce fruit. The season for producing fruit is limited. If a branch does not produce fruit, even if the branch otherwise seems

healthy, it gets cut off so that the vine can redistribute the nutrients to branches that will produce fruit.

I have seen this firsthand in the orchards. Orchardists understand time is of the essence as the growing season will soon pass, and the priority of the grower is to cultivate fruit-producing plants. Jesus emphasizes that fruitfulness is an essential marker of a “true disciple.” True disciples produce “much fruit.” Producing fruit is not a secondary priority, but a first-order priority. What if it is impossible to be healthy unless we are also fruitful? Jesus is presenting fruitfulness here as an essential marker of a disciple. No matter how new we are to the faith or how long we have been following Jesus, He invites us into partnership to produce redemptive fruit.

Let's give careful thought to the difficult truths Michael states so clearly. Discuss each of them, not as metaphor, but in their application to us as disciples:

1. Branches that don't produce fruit are cut off to redistribute the nutrient to the branches that will produce fruit.
2. Producing fruit is not a secondary priority, but a first-order priority.

Fruitfulness is multiplying with infinite potential.

At one church I pastored in orchard country, we sang a chorus with the line “you can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed.” One of the universal truths about fruit in creation is that fruit contains unlimited potential. Fruit contains the potential to multiply itself in every generation and across generations.

Jesus is calling us as disciples to partner with Him in creating and unleashing infinite potential for kingdom expansion in our world. Every single new disciple, leader or church — created in kingdom fruitfulness in cooperation with Jesus — contains infinite potential for the gospel. Every new disciple, leader or church can multiply itself in cooperation with Jesus for rapid kingdom expansion. When we

bear fruit as we were created and compelled by Christ to do, multiplication results! This is who we are. This is who God intends us to be. Every follower of Jesus can and should produce more followers of Jesus. Every spiritual leader can and should produce more spiritual leaders. Every church (regardless of size, age, or apparent resource) can and should produce new churches in fruitful gospel expansion. This is the way of Jesus. This is the heritage of our movement. Within each of us, connected to Christ, is infinite potential for the gospel.

It might seem like an impossible or lofty calling or task for some reading this. Friends, Jesus is inviting us into partnership in bearing fruit. This is not a

burden to bear, but a joyful opportunity to participate in. Everywhere in history where the church has captured the heart of God in this, the result has been spectacular! God always does more through our faith and obedience than we can think to ask or imagine. He gets the glory, and the kingdom expands in glorious redemptive movement. All we have to do is lean into Jesus, look for and follow His lead in the redemptive opportunities around us, and much fruit will result. Let's go and bear fruit!

Michael Forney is the superintendent of the Pacific Northwest Conference, the founder and lead strategist of Gravitational Leadership, and the co-author of "Gravity: Seven Essential Truths About Influence, Leadership, and Your Soul."

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"Fruit contains the potential to multiply itself in every generation and across generations." Are you mainly focused on the fruit your life will produce in your own generation – that you will see and know? Or, have you considered that a spiritual legacy is about fruit that will last across generations?

How have you seen cross-generational fruit produced in the lives of those who did not live to see it?

"Every follower of Jesus can and should produce more followers of Jesus." As you close your group time together, spend time in prayer for the following:

1. To be fruitful.
2. To not hoard the nutrients from the Vine.
3. To lead someone to Jesus and disciple them.
4. To produce fruit that outlives you.

May it be so. Amen.