

Russell Kelfer

**Some 30,
Some 60,
Some a Hundredfold**

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Series: The Parables of Scripture

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Some 30, Some 60, Some a Hundredfold

There is nothing more wonderful than to see something come to fruition. To pray for a harvest and see it come to pass is an experience never to be forgotten. To plant seeds, and then, after careful labors, see them begin to sprout, until ripe, luscious tomatoes, or beautiful vegetables raise their heads in salute to your efforts is a moment of joy forever.

To plant a tree in the yard and see that tiny, helpless little sprout anchored by a stick to keep it from falling, as it gradually spreads its roots into the soil, as the winds blow against it, as the rain pelts its leaves in the spring brings a mixture of fear and hope. Then, one day, you look out of your window and realize that after ten, fifteen, twenty years, that tree is a monument to God's process of growth. It stands majestically, limbs reaching above the rooftop, roots spreading deep beneath the surface of the lawn. Birds are nesting in its branches. The children gather beneath its rich foliage to escape the heat of the sun. It has become a haven, an example of strength, a source of encouragement.

It didn't happen overnight. You had to spray it for fungus, you had to prune back its branches so deeply you wondered if they would withstand the pain. You had to feed the root system when it got infected, you had to water its roots when the sky seemed hidden from clouds. But year after year went by, and what was once a straggly stick has now become a mighty oak. What joy. What fulfillment.

God understands that. He is the Creator who took that tiny seed and caused that mighty oak to form. He knew the process would be long, the labor sometimes tiring. But He also knew that if you were to one day have that gracious gift of green enhancing your yard, nothing else could enter in and choke it out. He would make it grow. He alone could. But your job, should you choose to accept it, would be to guard against the intrusions that sin had brought into nature's joy, and as they attacked the tree, you simply applied the antidote. You removed the blight, and God

did the rest.

He always will. He desires to see things grow. He desires to see things produce a harvest of fruit. Every apple that forms, every peach, every rose are tributes to both the Creator and His creation. The One who brought everything out of nothing simply by the voice of His Word brings glory to His Name every time something grows from a seed into fruition.

It is especially so with His children. He loves to see them grow into His Likeness. He loves to see the tonic of His Word applied to the disease of sin, allowing the magnificence of His grace to flow through the branches, until leaves begin to form; rich green leaves, where once only bare limbs existed. Then, slowly, rich, ripe fruit forms, and it is used to feed the hungry souls who stand beneath, waiting to be nurtured by the same strength-giving Word, until the process reproduces itself again and again.

It is His plan to bring in the Kingdom. His only plan. He longs for His children to grow up into Him and produce fruit, much fruit. And so it was, that as He broke the bread of Life into simple, childlike stories, sitting on the edge of that little fishing boat, teaching at a seaside Bible conference, that He came to the end of the story.

What a beautiful ending. He had been sharing some bad news. He had been explaining how different kinds of soil could receive the rich, ripe seed of Scripture and produce absolutely nothing. Especially discouraging was His description of seed falling on perfectly good soil and producing nothing, simply because the gardener was either too lazy or too busy to tend to the thorny weeds *that entered in and choked the Word*. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things kept entering in, *and by doing nothing*, the gardener allowed the enemy to steal into the soil with spiritual poison; and what could have been a life productive and beautiful produced absolutely nothing of eternal value.

But, praise God, the story doesn't end there. Jesus now gives *the rest of the story*. Listen:

And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the Word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred. (Mark 4:20)

See the process unfold. They "hear" the Word. That's

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knowledge. They “receive” the Word. They personalize it. That’s understanding. Ah, but then something wonderful happens. They apply the Word by obeying the Word and from their once barren lives comes fruit eternal. The Word reproduces itself in transforming power. God brings forth fruit. The harvest varies by divine design, but the harvest is glorious in every case. God has fulfilled His desire in creation. He told man to go and produce fruit.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

(Genesis 1:11)

God then looked at His creation and spoke again:

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

(Genesis 1:22)

Then He looked at man, the good gardener-to-be and He said:

...Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

(Genesis 1:28)

That was His divine plan. It was a portrait of a spiritual truth that would become the very foundation of the kingdom which was to come. Man was to reproduce fruit after his kind. He was to take the seed of the Word, plant it in the tender soil of his heart, and through careful gardening and sometimes fierce encounters with the enemy, *who was trying to enter in and choke the Word*, he was to see the fruit of God grow out of the branches of his heart.

As we said, that was His plan. It still is. Good soil, properly tended that receives the Word with a gardener who spends the time it takes to nurture it into experience, will always produce a harvest in the kingdom. It is an absolute. Good seed. Good soil. Good gardening. Rich fruit. Not an accident, or an occasional happening. There is a law of God involved, and it never fails. That is what Jesus was saying as He concluded His farming allegory on that sun-drenched beach that day.

There are, of course, three questions begging to be answered.

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1- Is there a “Godly Guide to Gardening” anywhere in Scripture that gives us more particulars on what it takes to produce fruit in an individual’s life? If so, where can it be found, and what kinds of tips on tending the soil does it offer?

2- Just what is this “fruit” God produces, and what does it look like? Can we see it? Can others? Is there more than one kind? Unless we understand what the fruit is, we are not as likely to pay the price to tend the garden.

3- Why does the output vary from 30 to 100 fold? Is it something we do or don’t do? Why the variation? Does this make someone a “better believer”?

Those are the questions we long to answer as we focus now on the glorious positive side of the parable of the sower. Fruit-bearing is possible. No, it is more than possible; more than probable. Fruit-bearing is a given, if we just listen to the Master Gardener carefully and follow the instructions written in the seed package called His word.

GOD’S GUIDE TO GOOD GARDENING

The first question that begs to be answered is “Where can we find more particulars on good gardening of the heart?” We know Jesus told us to beware of shallow soil that doesn’t allow for the roots to go deep, and when life’s storms come, the crop goes bad. He also told us to beware of “other things that enter in” when we aren’t paying attention and choke the Word. But there must be more information somewhere that gives us specific principles about good gardening so the soil the seed falls into has life-producing characteristics to start with.

Of course, there is. The entire Bible, is in a sense, a good gardening guide but there is, as usual, one chapter that seems to be a summation of all the principles in one simple outline. In John, chapter fifteen, Jesus spent a great deal of time talking to the disciples about what it takes to grow spiritual fruit, and in particular, about the one key ingredient without which you cannot so much as hope for a productive life. Verses 1-17 tell the story:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away:
and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it
may bring forth more fruit.

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Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

These things I command you, that ye love one another.

(John 15:1-17)

God's guide to gardening leaves no stone (or leaf) unturned. It tells us everything we need to know to have fruitful lives. The danger is that we are so familiar with the passage, we may miss

the crucial issues if we don't stop and list the principles one by one. Let's begin by doing that. To bear fruit in the Christian life, the following five things are musts:

1- You must be attached to the vine. Verse one tells us that Jesus is the vine and the Father is the vinedresser. Verse six tells us that you are either attached to the vine, and thus have the capacity to bear fruit, or you're not. If you aren't, it doesn't matter how spiritual you look or even how spiritually productive your life seems to be, *you will be gathered up at the end time like loose, dead limbs and thrown into the fire and burned.* You can't bear fruit if you aren't connected to the vine.

You may be religious. You may be moral. You may be a churchgoer. You may belong to a Christian church. You may belong to more than one Christian church. You may be a teacher, a preacher, a deacon, an elder. All of that nets you nothing. You may have a good friend who works in your office who lives the most moral life you know of. He may give away a third of his income to the less-privileged. He may never lose his temper, always seem happy. He may even belong to an organization or group that bears the name of Jesus. That does not make him a Christian, and it does not make the things he does that seem so good to be good works.

The life-giving flow of the Holy Spirit into your life can only bear fruit if the branch is connected to the tree. To bear fruit, you simply *must be born again.* There must come a moment in time when you see yourself as separated from God, and you see your sins as the cause of the separation. You don't just come to Christ because you like His program, or because He is love, and you want love. Those are good reasons, but not sufficient ones.

Jesus is the Savior. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Only Savior. No one comes to The Father unless they come to Him, asking Him to be their Savior. He came for one reason: to seek and to save that which was lost. Before you can be saved, you must realize you are lost. Before you can call on a Savior, you must realize you are a sinner. Once you realize that, you must repent. You are running from God; you must turn around and face God and call upon Him. When you call, He will answer. When you seek forgiveness, He will give it. When you cry out for redemption, *at that moment, His blood, shed for you on Calvary, will cover your sins, and His Spirit will enter your dead spirit and*

bring it alive. From that moment on, He will live in you and you will be forever connected to the vine. Nothing can ever separate you from the vine. Romans 8:38 and 39 reminds us:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Once in the vine, forever in the vine. But you can't graft yourself in. You can't decide it would look good to be a Christian or feel good to be a Christian, so you'll become one by bypassing that Cross. You must be born again. That Cross is the only way to be grafted into the vine, and unless you are, there will be no spiritual fruit ever produced from your life. None. That's principle number one: You must be attached to the vine for the Spirit to flow from the vine into the branches.

2- The second prerequisite for productive fruit-bearing is a tough one, and believers have tried to bypass it since the beginning. It is this: If you really want to produce healthy fruit, you must go through a process known as pruning. God must be freed to bring pain and pressure into your life to force out of your life the things that offend, and to allow into your life that spirit of dependence and surrender necessary for Him to be Lord. Yes, you can be a believer and bear fruit and never suffer. But no, you cannot continue to bear more fruit in the Christian life and grow more into His likeness without passing through the pruning process of trials. Jesus said it in verse 2:

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away:
and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it
may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:2)

You may be blocking the flow of power through the vine, and hence the production of lasting fruit by resisting God's hand of testing or divine discipline. Remember these verses?

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (when you begin to encounter all kinds of tests);

Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

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But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4)

In other words, if you want to have the mind of Christ, you must enter, at least to the degree God knows is appropriate for you, into the fellowship of His sufferings. I say to that degree because we are told in Scripture that:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

(I Corinthians 10:13)

So testing is a necessary part of the fruit-bearing procedure. If you resist God's hand of tribulation upon you by becoming bitter or presumptuous, you will continue your pilgrimage through the Christian life, *and if you complain enough, He may well remove the pressure*; but you are asking Him, in effect, to bypass the byproduct of seeing spiritual fruit come forth from your life.

Principle number one, then, is that you must be in the vine by virtue of salvation, or you cannot bear fruit. Principle number two adds: you must be willing to pass through the storms that water the ground beneath your feet or you will never consistently reach that place of yieldedness that allows the fruit-bearing process to accelerate or continue.

3- The third prerequisite is the cleansing of the heart that can only come from the Word of God.

Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you. (John 15:3)

Constant exposure to the Word of God is required to bear fruit. You can be on every committee in the church, pray, witness, give, and teach, and still not grow in grace or bear fruit. Fruit-bearing requires the Word of God. It is the agent the Spirit uses to give life. It carries the seed within itself that brings life to the branch. If you are wondering why you have been a Christian so long and with all of your activities, still seem to have no fire burning within you when it comes to fellowship with God, it may be that you are an active Christian but not an interactive Christian. You may be acting out your zeal without taking in the source of real zeal, which is the Scripture laid on the heart.

If you are not regularly in the Word, and regularly memorizing and meditating on it, don't scold God when you see no fruit.

You are trying to produce something only God can produce, and even though He gave you the medication that frees your heart to receive truth, you are staring at the bottle, wondering why the medicine doesn't work. The flow of the Spirit in your life must have clean conductors. Constant exposure to personalization of the Word of God is God's cleaning mechanism. Use it or you will get the results you deserve. Nothing.

4- You must realize on a day-by-day basis that you're not the vine, never will be, and don't want to be. You're only a branch. Your life depends on the Vine producing that life-sustaining Spirit, and your fruit depends on letting it happen. You couldn't produce fruit if you had a fruit-producing machine. Jesus said it all in verse 5:

I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me,
and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without
me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)

Nothing is an interesting word. It means nothing. We interpret that principle to mean that we need God's help to bear fruit. No, we do not need God to help, we need God to do it. To whatever degree we enter into the process by believing that we and God together are a team, we miss the point of being a team. The world says "God helps those who help themselves". God's word says, "God does for those who know they can't". The difference is monumental.

The act of continual surrender that accompanies an understanding of total lordship is a must if the life is to be a fruit-bearing life. The abiding Christian who knows he can do nothing apart from Christ *will bring forth much fruit*. And that's the only way we ever will.

5- Finally, verses 8-10 tell us that the bottom line is obedience. When we do not apply the truth we know, we can squirm around and act like a healthy branch all we want, but the disease of unconfessed sin will rot the limb from the inside out and we will produce no fruit. We can talk all day about loving God and serving God, but without implicit obedience in the areas where Satan has entered in and is choking the seed, we don't have a chance to bear lasting fruit. Listen to Jesus:

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue

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ye in my love.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (John 15:8-10)

God doesn't measure our love by how many times we tell Him. He doesn't measure it by how many songs or hymns we sing praising Him. He doesn't even measure it by how many things we do to show Him. He has said that what glorifies Him is when we bear fruit, and to do that we must quietly, quickly, simply obey what we know to do when we learn we are to do it.

If God speaks to you about a certain area of need or a certain area where Satan is entering in and choking the Word, and your response is "I need to do something about that some day, but for right now, I'm enjoying life as it is too much." or "I want to be totally committed to God and love Him with all my heart, but I'm not ready yet to obey in this particular area", then don't expect to glorify Him by bearing fruit. Obedience is a prerequisite for producing lasting spiritual fruit.

All of this to say that God's Guide to Better Gardening has a few simple tips on how to become a fruit-bearing branch in the tree of God's grace. You must be connected, willing to be tested, appropriating the Word continually, surrendered to God's sovereignty, and willingly, immediately obedient to what God asks you to do.

But all of that makes it sound somewhat legalistic and structured, when in reality, those are only ingredients of an incredible relationship that exists between God and man or God and woman *when their two hearts become one*.

The issue at stake is love. If we truly love God, and He, our loving Father sees a need to test us, *we get excited, not depressed*. If we are truly in love with our Lord, and He speaks to us, *we would never think of not listening to every word He says, of feeding on every commandment He gives*. If we truly love God, the last thing to enter our minds would be the thought of rejecting His lordship and trying to do in our own energy what only He can do in us and through us.

These, then, are not really prerequisites for fruit-bearing, but evidences of our love. If we really love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, God is telling us we need to develop that heart-to-heart relationship known as *abiding*. When

we truly begin to abide, we will never so much as think of not being purged, cleansed, surrendered, or obedient. Those become second nature when we have learned to *abide in Him*.

That, then, is the whole of the fruit-bearing parable. Those who abide in Him and allow His words to abide in them can ask what they will and receive it because their hearts are so entwined with His that their desires are one with His. When we abide in Him and He in us, we are filled with joy unspeakable; we enjoy peace like a river; we joyfully relax and allow His nature to flow through us and produce in us radiant, life-changing fruit, which will not only change us, but will overflow into the lives of everyone we meet and everyone we touch.

To abide means to remain in fellowship. It is a constant relationship that doesn't vacillate in its level of commitment, doesn't move in and out of that quiet place near to the heart of God. He or she has a permanent reservation in the center of the room of His love. He or she would rather die than grieve Him or break His heart.

Having a *quiet time* is not an arduous task to be performed, but a privilege to enjoy. Going to the mission field or even to spend time with that person you would not normally fellowship with, are not weights to carry, but opportunities granted by a gracious God for you to pour out your life on the altar as an evidence of the love you have for your Lord.

Tribulation is a joy, because you know He is performing surgery in your heart with the pressures in your life, and those surgeries will produce a far more exceeding weight of glory in the kingdom which is to come.

Have you learned to abide in Christ? Have you come to the place where being with Him and being in His word is more precious to you than silver or gold? Have you reached a place in your relationship with Him that is so dear to you, that you do not have to force yourself to give up things that enter in and choke the Word, simply because the sheer joy of pleasing Him overshadows any price you might pay in time or temporal pleasure in order to do His will.

In our next study we will look both in John 15 and in the rest of Scripture at what fruit really looks like. I believe there are three kinds of fruit borne in the Christian's life:

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- The fruit of the Spirit which changes our character,
- The fruit of His workmanship which accomplishes His will,
- And the fruit of power that is one with Him in prayer.

Each has a different kind of fruit and each evidences itself in different ways, but all have one thing in common. They are the direct result of that precious heart-to-heart relationship known as abiding in Christ.

If this kind of intimacy with God sounds somewhat foreign to you, or has somehow eluded you in the day-to-day expression of your walk with Christ, may I ask you this week, as we continue our quest for gardening excellence, to step back and devote all of the time you have available to seeking to come know Him that way.

Spend at least an hour or two meditating on John, chapter 15. Stop after each verse and worship Him and seek to personalize and appropriate what that verse says. With each new thought, ask God to make His love for you and your love for Him so real that to be tested, or purged, or instructed would be your joy. Ask Him to open your eyes and reveal to you the depth of love He has for you.

Ask Him to show you what a gracious Father He has been. Tell Him you don't want to finish your course with anything less than a total surrender to His heart, a total obedience to His will. Seek His face early, and seek it with all your heart. Seek not to simply use up the time, but rather to get to know Him better. Concentrate on who He is. List His attributes and worship your way through the Psalms, stopping to adore Him with each reminder of His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His sovereignty, His love.

Don't base the results on how you feel, but rather on what God seems to be doing in your heart. The issue isn't how He feels about you. That is constant, eternal, and unchangeable. It is how your heart beats for Him that must become increasingly intimate and everlastingly changed.

When that spirit of abiding begins to overtake you, you may well sense a whole new understanding of what fruit-bearing is. It isn't you doing something for God. It isn't the result of your faithfulness. It isn't the evidence of your worthiness.

Some 30, Some 60, Some a Hundredfold

It is all of grace, beloved. As you enter into the Holy of Holies daily and become so in tune with Him that all of life is a melody of love, you'll know what it is. It is the One you love so pouring Himself into you that you simply cannot contain it, and it overflows as life abundant into everyone you touch, even to the ends of the earth. You will be bearing fruit—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold. But that won't be the miracle. The miracle will be that you will be virtually unaware that it's happening. All you will know is that you are in love.

A Challenge to Further Study

Read John 15:1-17 again. Try to answer the following questions:

1- What do you think it means in verse 2 that the branch that is already bearing must be “purged” or “pruned”? Why is that necessary in the natural realm? Why does that thought seem repugnant to the natural mind? Does the verse give the reason for it?

2- What do you think it means that “the branch cannot bear fruit of itself”?

3- What do you think verse 7 means?

4- Verse 10 gives an unusual requirement for abiding in God's love. What is it? Why is it so crucial?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- How can understanding the concept of abiding make a difference in how you apply John, chapter 15, to your life?

2- Are you willing to devote most of the next week to asking God to reveal to you more about how to “abide in His love”?

3- How would you define “abiding” in Christ?

4- Take John, chapter 15, verses 1-17 and read and re-read them over and over this week. Personalize them. Define “abide” as you do. Ask God each time you read it to make it more real to you.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize John 15:4-5 this week

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