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From the Inside Out



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Jesus compared Himself to a grape vine, us to branches growing out of that vine – and God our Father as a Gardener walking up and down the rows of branches growing out of Christ our Vine.

What I just said is the heart of Christ's message to His disciples and to us. John 15 is one of the most precious parts of God's Word. It is also one of the most transforming. It makes Christian living a daily set of choices. It makes spiritual things vivid and understandable.

This morning God wants us to abide fruitfully in Jesus. 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.

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.

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.

God has targeted us to become fruitful branches in His vineyard. He wants mature branches.

In vineyards 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 fortieth 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!

Let's read.

[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). **RESPONSE: Lord -- I want to flourish in EVERY SEASON of my life.**
- 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). **RESPONSE: Lord -- I commit to worship and serve you all my days.**
- 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). **RESPONSE: Lord – I want you to do whatever it takes to make and keep me fruitful!**
- 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). **RESPONSE: Lord – You are GOOD whatever you do in my life!**

God wants to mature us –

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- In fruit bearing attitudes that glorify Him,
- In fruit bearing actions that magnify Him,
- In fruit bearing treasure investments that are at His disposal, and
- In fruit bearing time investments for His glory.

That is exactly what Psalm 92 says. Matured saints, or those who are "older" in the faith have so many blessings from the Lord.

Matured saints have deep roots, they have weathered the storms, they have experienced painful losses, and 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.

These beautiful and life-sustaining trees are mentioned in Psalm 92.

God says that the picture of a righteous person or saint should reflect 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 first 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.

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 CHOICE OF 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 CHOICE OF A PACT OF PERSONAL PURITY)**

4 A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness. **(Note his CHOICE OF 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. **(Note his CHOICE OF LIMITING HIS PERSONAL FREEDOM/EXPOSURES like we should to 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.

God wants truth alive within us. Psalm 51:6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. NKJV

Spiritual life starts inside, grows from the inside out, and dictates what we are on the outside. 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) KJV

God sees us for what we really are – on the INSIDE. 1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." NKJV

Our words and deeds flow from what we really are inside the center of our beings, our heart. Matthew 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. NKJV

We only survive spiritual warfare if we are living in truth. Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, NKJV

When faced with God's desires for us we should echo the prayer song of David who knew and followed so faithfully His Lord. Listen to what he sang in [Psalm 139:23-24](#) Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting. NKJV

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. 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.

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

Today God is watching to see if you are tuned in to Him or not. [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

David said he had chosen the Lord as his top priority on earth. Have you made that choice yet? [Psalm 73:25](#), Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. (NKJV)

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 order to please God. [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)

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 Lord wants us to hold everything we have before Him and ask for His examination and approval.

Matured saints reaching Psalm 92 in 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 pleasures so quickly become empty.

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 attitude of exceptionism.** [2 Samuel 12:7](#) Then Nathan said to David, You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul." NKJV [Psalm 51:4](#) Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. NKJV **Beware of the attitude 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.
- **Beware of a superiority attitude.** [Romans 12:3](#) For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. NKJV 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.
- **Beware of a self promotion attitude.** [Isaiah 53:6](#) All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. NKJV; [Philippians 2:4](#) Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. NKJV Many people seem to think they must be their own PR person – they always are laying out a barrage of good publicity – **about themselves.** 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.
- **Beware of an unforgiving attitude.** [Matthew 18:33-35](#) Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." NKJV; [Ephesians 4:32](#) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. NKJV 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.
- **Beware of an unhumiliated attitude.** [James 4:6](#) But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." NKJV; [1](#)

Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." NKJV 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 if we don't --

- **Flee all lusts:** 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. There are only three things God commands us to flee (**pneugo** in the present active aorist tense of Greek; that means we are responsible and we have a choice to make.)

FORNICATION: (any moral laxity) **1 Corinthians 6:18** Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. NKJV. God will not overlook any moral laxity even if we say we have unusual sexual desires and God's rules are too restrictive.

IDOLATRY: (serving anything more than God) **1 Corinthians 10:14** *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.* NKJV

MATERIALISM: (the insatiable craving for more stuff) **1 Timothy 6:11** But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. NKJV 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.

- **Submit as a lifestyle :** **Ephesians 5:22-23** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. NKJV 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.
- **Serve God to the end :** **Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. NKJV 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.
- **Keep the body harnessed :** **1 Corinthians 9:27** But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. NKJV 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.
- **Live with Integrity :** 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. 3 John 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. NKJV

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

- **"Fear not" is the most repeated negative prohibition in God's Word!** (56 times in the Old Testament and 16 times in the New Testament) 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 the 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.

- **Psalm 73:25** Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. NKJV

My pleasure needs need to get surrendered to His pleasures planned for me.

- **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

My happiness is supplied by His happiness welling up within me by His Spirit.

- **Romans 5:1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, NKJV

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

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

My success is flowing from the Word Filled Life that produces His success.

- **Joshua 1:8** 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. NKJV

Ideas drawn from Roy Gustafson, *In His Land Seeing Is Believing*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1980, p. . 75-78 .

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Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me: Experience The Loving Leadership of Jesus*, (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1996, Pages 193-194.

Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me: Experience The Loving Leadership of Jesus*, (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1996, Pages 218-219.

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