

# **Fruitfulness Explained: John 15.1-8 Run the Race, Look to Jesus**

This morning we are looking at what God wants from everyone of us who live in the body He made for us. This body is His Temple and what we do with this temple will be the basis for our everlasting reward in His Presence.

The man that knew more about the Christian life than anyone else compared it to an agonizing endurance race. That same man – the Apostle Paul tells us that the main examination that we as believers will face is the question, “What did you do with your body?” Remember that 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6.19-20 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5.10 reminds us that:

Our body was made by God.  
Our body was bought by Christ's sacrifice.  
Our body will stand before Christ's Throne.  
Our body is the basis of our judgment for rewards.

Rewards are given for pleasing God.  
Fruit is what is produced by God in my life as I please Him -- that will last forever.

How does God produce fruit in our lives? In John 15 we find the secret to fruit, rewards, fruitfulness and pleasing God in all we do. It is a two way street – He abides in us and we abide in Him.

God has outlined for us in His Word the four areas He watches, remembers and will someday test for fruitfulness. Do you know them? Are you cultivating these four areas each day for His Glory?

Fruit Consists of inviting Jesus into each area of my life and letting Him take it over. When Jesus is invited into each area what happens?

My time becomes where He “abides” (John 15);  
my possessions are all evaluated by how to make God “rich” and not me (Luke 12);

my attitude becomes His personality (Galatians 5);  
my body is not mine any more and I present" it to Him (Romans 12).

### **CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY TIME:**

Remember the river of our life flowing by at 60 minutes an hour? This is all about how we use, how we prioritize, and how we spend our moments.

***Has God said anything about that time? Yes*** –Seek Me FIRST (Matthew 6.33). Jesus wants to be welcomed into all of my time. That is what abide means, He wants to "stay" with you – get up each morning and eat with you, go out to the car and ride with you, sit at your desk while you work, go to lunch, ride home and spend the evening with you. He wants you to notice Him, talk to Him, and let Him be a part of your life.

### **CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY TREASURES:**

This is what we do with our money. This is how we view our possessions.

***Has God said anything about those treasures? Yes*** – Jesus said much about money, the summary would be two passages – in Matthew 6: 19-21 He says lay not up and in Luke 12 He says be rich towards God!

### **CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY ATTITUDES:**

This is what we do with our minds. This is how we relate to life and people.

***Has God said anything about that mind? Yes*** –

- **HE WANTS TO CAPTIVATE MY THOUGHTS.** 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, ***bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,***
- **HE WANTS TO DRAW MY AFFECTIONS:** Colossians 3:1-2 If then you were raised with Christ, ***seek those things which are above,*** where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.
- **HE WANTS TO TRANSFORM MY PERSONALITY:** Scriptures show us in Galatians 5:22-23— when God's Spirit is at the helm, there is a remarkable change in our homes, churches, and lives. We see that as believers we are in the same family—God is our Father. We are headed toward a common goal—heaven. We serve a common Master—Jesus. We follow the same Guide—His Word. And share the same passion—that

Christ gets all the glory. So in our lives the anointing of the Holy Spirit is the **moment-by-moment** appropriation of God's power over the pests that irritate and nag us in life. Only the Holy Spirit can free us from frustrations and irritations. Only the Holy Spirit can quiet us and bring us to contentment.

**CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY ACTIONS:** What we do with our bodies. Has God said anything about that body? Yes -- Romans 12.1. My Actions: Romans 12

- **HE WANTS TO CONTROL MY BODY:** 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 (imperative) to this world, but be transformed (imperative) by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*
- **HE WANTS TO FOCUS MY LIFE:** Hebrews 12:1-2 *Wherefore seeing we have encircling us so great a cloud of witnesses, let us put off all bulk weight, and the loosely fitting sin, and let us run with patience the race [agōna] that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the leader [archēgon] and finisher [teleiōtēn] of the faith.* This focus is to be in three areas God points out in His Word. I must DROP whatever hinders my focus on Jesus; I must RUN the race God has marked for me; I must LOOK at Jesus as my example to follow.
- **HE WANTS TO CRUCIFY MY FLESH:** Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Now take some time with me looking at Hebrews 12.1-2. Notice what God wants me to choose to point my life towards, this is His focus for me. Remember the three areas He gives us to work on. DROP-RUN-LOOK

I must DROP whatever hinders my focus on Jesus; I must RUN the race God has marked for me; I must LOOK at Jesus as my example to follow.

- DROP whatever hinders my focus on Jesus. Lay aside, ditch, get rid of it. Quit, avoid, flee and forsake it.
- RUN the race God has marked for me. Persevere, stay at it, don't grow weary of it, finish the course.
- LOOK at Jesus as my example to follow. Focus on Him, follow His example, keep Him in mind, see Him as the goal. Await Him at the end of your race, see Him giving you the prize, await His smile and well done.

These exhortations come in pairs. First we are to DROP:

- **DROP ANY HINDRANCE: Let us also lay aside every encumbrance.** (12:1b) An **encumbrance** (*onkos*) is simply a bulk or mass of something. It is not necessarily bad in itself. Often it is something perfectly innocent and harmless. But it weighs us down, diverts our attention, saps our energy, dampens our enthusiasm for the things of God. We cannot win when we are carrying excess weight. When we ask about a certain habit or condition, "What's wrong with that?" the answer often is, "Nothing in itself." The problem is not in what the weight is but in what it does. It keeps us from running well and therefore from winning. *"Not all hindrances or weights are sin, however. In fact, what is a hindrance to you may not be a hindrance in any way to someone else. A hindrance is something, otherwise good, that weighs you down spiritually. It could be a friendship, an association, an event, a place, a habit, a pleasure, an entertainment, an honor. But if this otherwise good thing drags you down, you must strip it away. For example, there may be an ostensibly harmless place (a forest, a store, an apartment, a city) that, because of your past sins, still lures you downward. Such a place must be tossed aside and forgotten<sup>1</sup>."*
- **DROP EVERY SIN: Let us also lay aside ... the sin which so easily entangles us.** (12:1c) All around our planet God has made warning signs about the deadly nature of sin. They are terrifying if we think about them. One of the clearest are the species of fly catching plants. These plants offer alluring sweetness at the cost of death. Listen to the lesson of these plants: *"Perhaps you have seen it yourself while lying on the grass by a sundew plant when a fly lights on one of its leaves to taste one of the glands that grow there. Instantly, three crimson-tipped, finger-like hairs bend over and touch the fly's wings, holding it firm in a sticky grasp. The fly struggles mightily to get free, but the more it struggles, the more hopelessly it is coated with adhesive. Soon the fly relaxes, but to its fly-mind "things could be worse," because it extends its tongue and feasts on the sundew's sweetness while, it is held even more firmly by still more sticky tentacles. When the captive is entirely at the plant's mercy, the edges of the leaf fold inward, forming a closed fist. Two hours later the fly is an empty sucked skin, and the hungry fist unfolds its delectable mouth for another easy entanglement. Nature has given us a terrifying allegory. But the most sobering thing we see here is that "the sin which so easily entangles" us refers to the specific sin(s) each of us, individually, is most likely to commit—a "besetting sin" as it is termed in the older translations. We each have characteristic sins that more easily entangle us than others. Some sins that tempt and degrade others hold little appeal for us—and vice versa. Sensuality may be the Achilles' heel for many men, but not all. Another who has gained victory over such sin may regularly down jealousy's deadly*

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews Vol 1&2—An Anchor for the Soul*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.

*nectar, not realizing it is rotting his soul. Dishonesty may never tempt some souls, for guile simply has no appeal to them, but just cross them and you will feel Satan's temper! What sin is it that so easily entangles you or me? Covetousness? Envy? Criticism? Laziness? Hatred? Lust? Unthankfulness? Pride? Whatever sin it is, it must be stripped off and left behind"<sup>2</sup>.*

Next we are to RUN. Notice what God's Word instructs us as we continue in Hebrews 12.1b

- **RUN OUR RACE:** "and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (v. 1b). Notice the words are specific. "the race marked out for us". God has planned a specific pathway we follow through life for Him. It is not the same as another's. Ours may have deep valley and steep hills, there's may be all flat and sunny. Ours may be long and lonely, there's may be short and sweet. That is what God plans, we just follow the race track He marks out for us.
- **RUN OUR RACE -- TO THE END:** Like the Apostle Paul said – we all need to FINISH well. Listen to his testimony of what kept him going: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). That testimony is a comfort to us. We can finish OUR racecourse in HIS strength. And when we do so there is joy from above.

Finally the Scriptures tell us how all this is possible. The only way to accomplish all that the Lord has planned for you and me is to obey this final exhortation. Notice Hebrews 12:2.

- **LOOK TO JESUS AS OUR EXAMPLE:** Notice that we are to focus on Jesus, instead of the name Christ. God is calling us to focus on Jesus' humanity as we see Him in the Four Gospels. The Psalms capture much of what we see in the Gospels. "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11). Then there was the joy of being crowned with honor and glory and having all things put under his feet (2:6–8; cf. Psalm 8:4–6). There was also the joy before him of bringing many sons to glory—making us part of his joy (2:10). Here is the message God gives us in these two verses -- get totally absorbed with Jesus. We do this first by DROPPING everything and anything —that distract us from Him. Then we RUN the race of life as we LOOK at Jesus — consciously focusing and meditating on Jesus. This happens as we read and re-read the Gospels. He must be the measure of all things we hold onto in life.
- **LOOK AT JESUS AS OUR PRIZE:** "Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God". (12:2b) In the ancient Isthmian games of Greece, a pedestal

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<sup>2</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews Vol 1&2—An Anchor for the Soul*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.

stood at the finish line, and on it hung a wreath-the winner's prize. No one runs a race without some expectation of reward. Jesus ran for two things, **the joy set before Him** and **sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God**. The prize Christians are to run for is not heaven. If we are truly Christians, if we belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ, heaven is already ours. We should be able to look forward to the day when our Lord says to us, "Well done, ... enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21). "In the future," the apostle says, "there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). And when we get to heaven, we can join the twenty-four elders in casting our "crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power'" (Rev. 4:10-11).<sup>3</sup>

To conclude this portion of our study we need to allow Paul to apply to each of us how we are to allow God to use our body. We give Him our time, we invest our treasures with Him, we allow Him to transform our attitudes, and now we give Him control of our bodies.

Paul explains this best using the image of the Race (Gk. stadion). He uses such phrases as "run in a race" (1 Cor. 9:24), "running well" (Gal. 5:7), and "run in vain" (Phil. 2:16). This is the same figure here in Hebrews 12:1-3.

Of the different games the New Testament mentions four: foot racing, boxing, chariot racing, and wrestling. The footrace is mentioned most frequently. There are four ways that God asks us to yield to Him. These involve getting Christ's focus for the race of life.

- **Look Around: The Foot racing reminds us to look at the race track and stay in our lane. Nothing can be tolerated that may disqualify us (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9.24-26a).** Each believer is on the track; each has a special lane in which to run; and each has a goal to achieve. If we reach the goal the way God has planned, then we receive a reward. If we fail, we lose the reward, but we do not lose our citizenship. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9.24-26a **"Do you not know that those running in a race-course [*en stadiō*] all run indeed, but one attains the prize. Run thus, that you may win. Everyone who contends [*agōnizomenos*] is self-disciplined in everything, that they indeed might win a perishable victor's crown [cf. Gal 2:2], but we an imperishable. Therefore I run [*trecho*] thus, not as if uncertainly;** The word castaway (1 Cor. 9:27) is a technical word familiar to those who knew the Greek games. It means "disapproved, disqualified." At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the

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<sup>3</sup>MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified. He was concerned lest he ignore himself and find himself disqualified. Again, it was not a matter of losing personal salvation. (The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize.) The whole emphasis is on rewards, and Paul did not want to lose his reward<sup>4</sup>.

- **Look Within: Boxing points to our opposition to our flesh -- the enemy within us (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9.26b-27). I box [pukteuō] thus, not as if shadow-boxing; but I punch [hypōiazō] my body and I treat it harshly [like beating a slave, doulagōgō], lest perhaps having proclaimed to others, I myself should become a failure [adokimos]" (1 Cor 9:26b–27).** The word castaway (1 Cor. 9:27) is a technical word familiar to those who knew the Greek games. It means "disapproved, disqualified." At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified. He was concerned lest he ignore himself and find himself disqualified. Again, it was not a matter of losing personal salvation. (The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize.) The whole emphasis is on rewards, and Paul did not want to lose his reward<sup>5</sup>.

Any contestant found breaking the training rules was automatically disqualified. In recent years, Evangelical Christians have rediscovered the importance of personal discipline and the relationship between a disciplined body and a Spirit-filled life. We must, of course, avoid extremes. On the one hand, religious asceticism is unhealthy and of no value spiritually (Col. 2:18–23). But on the other hand, there is something to be said for disciplined eating, exercising, and resting, and a Spirit-directed balanced life.

1. We smugly congratulate ourselves that we do not smoke or use alcohol, but what about our overeating and overweight?
2. We loudly proclaim our liberty in Christ and yet we are so bound by our stress overloaded lives that many Christians cannot discipline their time so as to have a consistent devotional life or Bible-study program<sup>6</sup>.

- **Look Without: Wrestling refers to our fight with the powers of darkness around us.** Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle (Gk. *pale*) against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe.

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe.

<sup>6</sup> These paragraphs quoted, adapted, and paraphrased from Wiersbe, *Philippians 3 Commentary*.

rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- **Look Ahead: Chariot Racing looks forward to the heavenly prize and the intense focus needed to finish the race.**

Philippians 3:13-14 **“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, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** Bible students are not agreed as to the exact sport Paul is describing, whether the footrace or the chariot race. Either one will do, but my own preference is the chariot race. The Greek chariot, used in the Olympic Games and other events, was really only a small platform with a wheel on each side. The driver had very little to hold on to as he raced around the course. He had to lean forward and strain every nerve and muscle to maintain balance and control the horses. The verb “reaching forth” in Philippians 3:13 literally means “stretching as in a race.”

1. **CHOOSE GOD’S WAY TO DEAL WITH PAST HURTS:** Paul says in Philippians 3:13 “forgetting those things which are behind”. It is an impossible<sup>7</sup> feat of mental and psychological gymnastics to try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. That is not what Paul asks, rather he explains that **we break the power of the past by living for the future**. Apart from senility, hypnosis, or a brain malfunction, no mature person can forget what has happened in the past. We may wish that we could erase certain bad memories, but we cannot. “To forget” in the Bible means “no longer to be influenced by or affected by.” When God promises, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17), He is not suggesting that He will conveniently have a bad memory! This is impossible with God. What God is saying is, “I will no longer hold their sins against them. Their sins can no longer affect their standing with Me or influence My attitude toward them.”
2. **LET GOD MAKE US FORGET:** We cannot change the past, but we can change the **meaning** of the past. The events do not change, but our understanding of them changed. A good example of this principle is Joseph (Gen. 45:1–15). When he met his brothers the second time and revealed himself to them, he held no grudge against them. To be sure, they had mistreated him, but he saw the past from God’s point of view. As a result he was unable to hold anything against his brothers. Joseph knew that God had a plan for his life—a race for him to run—and in

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Philippians*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.



fulfilling that plan and looking ahead, he broke the power of the past. Too many Christians are shackled by regrets of the past. They are trying to run the race by looking backward! No wonder they stumble and fall and get in the way of other Christians! Some Christian runners are being distracted by the **successes** of the past, not the failures; and this is just as bad. "The things which are behind" must be set aside and "the things which are before" must take their place. The Christian does not run the race in order to get to Heaven. He is in the race because he has been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Only Greek citizens were allowed to participate in the games, and they had to obey the rules both in their training and in their performing.

So how can we today get a handle on our bodies offered to the Lord? It starts in our minds as we from our wills declare our allegiance to Him. Turn again with me to the testimony book of hymns. Look at number 379.

## TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE

Frances R. Havergal (1836–1879) was an *English poet whose poetry made a significant contribution to Christian hymnody*. Havergal's father, William Henry Havergal, was an Anglican rector in Worcestershire. An accomplished musician who wrote about one hundred hymns, he instilled in his daughter a lifelong passion for knowledge. She was educated in boarding schools in England and Germany, where she learned several modern languages plus Greek and Hebrew. Her poems communicate a simple, childlike faith, yet they are still profound. The most well known of her fifty hymns and two hundred poems are "Take My Life, and Let It Be" (1874), "Like a River Glorious" (1878), "Who Is on the Lord's Side?" (1877), and "I Gave My Life for Thee."

At the age of forty-two, when told by her physician that her physical condition was serious and that she did not have long to live, Miss Havergal replied, "If I am really going, it is too good to be true." At the bottom of her bed she had her favorite text placed where she could readily see it: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Her prayer, "Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold," was not lightly stated. In August, 1878, Miss Havergal wrote to a friend,

"In this day of self-centered living and pleasure-oriented lifestyle, the total commitment to God of body, mind, and possessions portrayed in this text is difficult for many Christians to achieve. Even though we realize that we have nothing we have not received, we must act like we are only stewards of the good gifts He has given. The Lord has shown me another little step, and, of course, I have taken it with extreme delight. "Take my silver and

my gold" now means shipping off all my ornaments to the church Missionary House, including a jewel cabinet that is really fit for a countess, where all will be accepted and disposed of for me....Nearly fifty articles are being packed up. I don't think I ever packed a box with such pleasure<sup>8</sup>.

- 1       Take my life, and let it be  
          Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
          Take my moments and my days,  
          Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2       Take my hands, and let them move  
          At the impulse of Thy love;  
          Take my feet, and let them be  
          Swift and beautiful for Thee.
- 3       Take my voice, and let me sing  
          Always, only, for my King;  
          Take my lips, and let them be  
          Filled with messages from Thee.
- 4       Take my silver and my gold:  
          Not a mite would I withhold;  
          Take my intellect, and use  
          Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose.
- 5       Take my will, and make it Thine:  
          It shall be no longer mine;  
          Take my heart it is Thine own:  
          It shall be Thy royal throne.
- 6       Take my love, my Lord, I pour  
          At Thy feet its treasure store;  
          Take myself and I will be  
          Ever, only, all for Thee!

- **HE WANTS TO CRUCIFY MY FLESH:** Galatians 2: 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. There are 7 elements of the crucified life I would like to remind you of? A victim crucified like Jesus was would experience the same horrors of the cross. The seven elements were: nailed down hands, nailed down feet, a life stopped in its tracks, a body fastened down immovably to a tree, a side pierced through to the heart, a crown of spike like thorns pounded down onto their head, all their possessions taken away and thrown at their feet and only Heaven lies ahead. What does this

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<sup>8</sup> Osbeck, Kenneth W., *101 Hymn Stories*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications) 1997.

consecrated life of a crucified disciple look like? Look again at the seven elements. They were:

1. nailed down hands, = Hands that would only do what Jesus would do.
2. nailed down feet, = Feet that would only go where Jesus would go.
3. a life stopped in its tracks, = A life no longer lived for self but for HIM who died for them!
4. a body fastened down immovably to a tree, = A life that no longer looks back and is defeated by the pains, scars and abuses of the past. A life that always looks unto Jesus.
5. a side pierced through to the heart, = A life that shares the compassion of Christ for the multitudes lost, helpless and hopeless.
6. a crown of spike like thorns pounded down onto their head, = A life that takes on the attitude and actions of a servant.
7. all their possessions taken away and thrown at their feet and = A life that gives everything back to Jesus willingly and joyfully. So only Heaven lies ahead. A life that is waiting, looking and longing for Christ's return!

**Author:** an Indian prince, as sung in Garo, Assam

**Composer:** Folk melody from India

**Tune:** I Have Decided to Follow Jesus (Indian trad?)

**Scripture:** Matt 8:19-20; Luke 9:61-2; Matt 16:24; Mark 8

- 1 I have decided to follow Jesus;  
I have decided to follow Jesus;  
I have decided to follow Jesus;  
No turning back, no turning back.
- 2 Tho' none go with me, I still will follow,  
Tho' none go with me I still will follow,  
Tho' none go with me, I still will follow;  
No turning back, no turning back.
- 3 My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;  
My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus,  
my cross I'll carry till I see Jesus;  
No turning back, No turning back.
- 4 The world behind me, the cross before me,  
The world behind me, the cross before me;  
The world behind me, the cross before me;  
No turning back, no turning back.