

ONE MORE YEAR TO GROW

Tim Dubberly & Mark Beard: December 27, 1998

Text: Luke 13:6-9

The beginning of the New Year has become a time for new resolutions and new goals. We resolve to do certain works or to change certain habits, all in hopes of making ourselves a better people. Many try going on a diet, or to stop smoking or to become a more organized person—everyone seems to be trying to start or stop something. No matter what you decide to do it is safe to say that it will require you to change—that you become committed to a decision.

As Christians it is good that we stop and review the past year. What have we accomplished as a church, or as a person? Have we done our best, have we pleased God? Does God see us as being fruitful? What happened to all those resolutions of last year? Does it seem that many have been forgotten?

One thing that would make our walk more fruitful is to have some concrete resolutions to live by—a clear and measurable goal. ■ A man by the name of Johnathan Edwards made these resolutions: “To live with all my might while I do live. Never to lose one moment of time. Never to do anything which I should despise or think meanly of in another. Never to do anything out of revenge. Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.”

(Hewett, 155)

These are noble aspirations but pleasing God involves more than good intentions, we must first deny ourselves to truly follow Christ. We must become dedicated and committed if we are to reach our resolutions or goals. Imagine how ridiculous it would be for us to do nothing to promote spiritual growth in our lives, and yet take for granted that we will grow and mature in Christ just because we are saved. We would be like the fig tree in our text, there, alive but unfruitful. *Fortunately, our Savior, like the caretaker of the fig tree, understands that if the right steps are taken our unfruitfulness can be turned into fruitfulness.* Look with me at the **steps** that were taken by this man in the parable in order to bring a tree to fruitfulness and see how we can also become fruitful.

I. JESUS REALIZED THAT THE TREE'S PROBLEM WAS UNFRUITFULNESS.

A. The first step in any change is admitting there is a problem.

An alcoholic, for example, must first admit that he/she is an alcoholic before there can be a turn around in his/her life. *Even someone whose live is in trouble can put up a good front for a while.* As Christians we must first admit there is a problem in our spiritual life before there will be a turn around for us.

B. One important step to pleasing God is to “bear fruit.”

■ A little girl once described it this way. She was learning the fruit of the spirit, so when asked to recite them, she said, "Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Remote Control. (Rowell 74)

Although she was a little confused, most would probably agree that we operate best when operated by the Holy Spirit's remote control.

C. Why is bearing fruit so important?

Mainly, bearing fruit is important because it reveals our character. It reveals to the world the Jesus inside of us.

II. JESUS UNDERSTOOD THAT THE RESTRICTIONS TO PRODUCTIVITY HAD TO BE REMOVED.

A. Jesus can rid us of the hindrances to growth.

God is willing to take the time with us as individuals so that we all may be saved. Here the tree is not immediately destroyed, but is given an extra year of grace, even beyond the three years its owner had already waited. How many times have we been given that extra “year” of grace? The obvious implications here are that, Israel, God's people, had failed to recognize her season of opportunity.

As God's people have we failed to recognize our season of opportunity?

B. The caretaker got rid of all that would choke out growth.

Those things that choke the word, the lust of the world and of other things entering into our hearts will choke the Word. We need to understand that certain things can restrict fruitfulness.

■ “Once there was a man who had a flowering tree in his garden. A wooden tag was attached to one of its branches by a tiny wire. As the branch grew, the wire began to cut into it. He saw that the leaves were not flourishing like those on the other branches, so he removed the wire. In a few days the branch began flowering. Soon the marks of the wire disappeared.

Some of you may be in danger of withering because of the constrictions of sin. If you will return to the abiding place which is Christ, you will discover that He will begin to work through you; once more you will demonstrate that abiding in Christ brings fruitfulness.” (Barnhouse)

C. Jesus can rid us of the unfruitfulness in our life.

We must get rid of unfruitful thoughts and actions that are stopping us from producing. We must get our priorities in order.

III. JESUS POINTED TO THE NEED OF NOURISHMENT IN ORDER TO BECOME PRODUCTIVE AGAIN.

A. If we want to produce Godly character, we must receive nourishment.

Simply put, the Holy Spirit cannot nourish our souls if we never pray and commune with God in the spirit.

B. If we are to produce a life of faith we must know the Word of God.

The Word produces a fruitful faith, a daily faith that keeps us from needing a miracle every time we turn around.

USA Today offers these statistics on: *Reasons adults give for reading the Bible.*

- 81% Spiritual direction/guidance
- 73% Feel closer to God
- 71% Principles/guidelines for life
- 66% Interesting
- 59% Enjoyable
- 39% Christians are supposed to

Source: Tyndale/Barna By Anne R. Carey and Julie Stacey, USA TODAY

Everyone seems to be receiving something from the Word except those who read it because “Christians are supposed to.”

CONCLUSION

Life is full of routines, many of which seem heavy and unexciting. Many will forsake the daily routine for something more glamorous. But *it is faithfulness, even in the mundane routines of everyday life that produce the right kind of fruitfulness.*

■ In his book, *Ordering Your Private World*, Gordon MacDonald tells how one of his college professors gave him a piece of priceless advice.

Here's how it happened. MacDonald read a paper to a special gathering of students and teachers at Denver Seminary expressing his views on a burning moral issue. To write that paper, MacDonald cut 2 of his classes during the day, one of which was the Missionology class of Dr. Raymond Buker.

Dr. Buker came up to MacDonald after the special meeting and said, "Gordon, the paper you read tonight was a good one but not a great one. Would you like to know why?" MacDonald sensed this would hurt but said yes. "The paper wasn't a great one," Dr. Buker said as he thumped his finger on MacDonald's chest, "because you sacrificed the routine to write it."

MacDonald concluded, "In pain I learned one of the most important lessons I ever needed to learn. Because my time as a Christian leader is generally my own to use as I please, it would be very easy to avoid routine, unspectacular duties and give my self only to the exciting things.

The man or woman who learns how to make peace with routine responsibilities and obligations will make the greatest contribution in the long run."

Larson (213) 1996

Taking the right *steps* in our spiritual life is very important. We need to thank God for our life and ask Him to help us to become more productive Christians in this next year. Growing in the Spirit is important. As far as we know, the Lord has given us *One More Year to Grow* both spiritually and as a church. So let's do our part to have the most productive year ever.