

Some of you may know the story of Dawson Trotman, **founder of the Navigators**, an organization originally begun with the goal of reaching men serving in the Navy.

Trotman began to meet with a Navy man named Les Spencer, teaching him basic truths from the Bible. After a while, Spencer brought a friend from the ship to Trotman and said, "*Dawson, I want you to teach him all you have taught me.*"

Trotman refused. He said, "*I am not going to teach him; you are going to teach him. If you cannot teach him what I have taught you, then I have failed.*"

So, Les Spencer began to teach his friend, and the multiplication process began. Spencer's friend found someone else who wanted to be taught, ***and the process continued until on that one ship there were (125) men meeting every week for prayer and Bible study.*** Those men were shipped off to other ships and bases, until, at the height of World War II, there were groups of believers started by these men on more than (1000) ships and naval bases all over the world.

Soon the FBI heard about these groups on the Navy's ships with no name or charter and it began to investigate. When an agent went to one participant to find out how they got started, he would say, "*I don't know, I met someone on another ship who started a group.*" So, the FBI agents went to that person to question him, and then were referred to someone on another ship. **This investigation went on for three months until they were finally able to find the culprit who started the whole thing: Dawson Trotman. That's how the ministry of the Navigators began.**

I thought of Dawson Trotman this week as I contemplated the words of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it might produce more fruit ...As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*" **Those are powerful words that tell us a lot!!**

FIRST OFF, WE HEAR... WE ARE TO BEAR FRUIT. That is why we have been called together as a community. We are not here simply to enjoy one another's company. We are not even here solely to acknowledge God's power over our lives. **Both of these are vital.** But there is a **third ingredient in the triad of faith**, and that is that **we are to prepare ourselves to bear fruit in the community.**

Jesus put it as pointedly as possible. The barren tree will be thrown into the fire. What good is a grape vine without grapes? What use is a fig tree without figs? Tear it down, strip its branches, throw it into the flames. Nothing could be clearer than this principle: **WE ARE TO BEAR FRUIT.**

It is clear in the Gospels that Jesus admired those in the secular world who put this principle into practice.

I was reading about Charles Schwab recently. He seems to have been born with an industrial spirit. As a young boy, he started out by picking up walnuts around the neighborhood, putting them into sacks and storing them at his house until he had enough to sell. Then, at age 12, he graduated to running a small chicken operation. He had a dozen chicks by the time he was 13 and soon developed what he calls "a fully integrated operation" by offering eggs, fryers, and chicken fertilizer."

Jesus said that the children of this world are wiser than children of light.

Why can't we have a spirit of drive and innovation within the body of Christ? Who says our churches have to become museums? **We have what the world desperately needs.** Wall Street doesn't have it. Madison Avenue doesn't have it. Even Yale and Harvard don't have it. **We have it.** We have the Good News of Jesus Christ to share with the world. **Why are we not bearing more fruit?**

OF COURSE, AS "FRUIT BEARERS" IT IS OUR 'RESPONSIBILITY' TO MAKE IT HAPPEN!!

In a PEANUTS strip Lucy is parked in her psychiatric booth, and Charlie Brown is sharing his problems with her. "Sometimes I ask myself questions," he begins. "Sometimes I ask myself, ~Is this your real life, or is this just a pilot film?"

Is my life a (39) week series or is it something special?" In no time at all Lucy analyzes his problem and gives an instant answer: ***"Whatever it is, your ratings are down., Five cents, please.!"***

Poor Charlie Brown. He senses that nothing much is happening in his life. Some of us may feel that way, too. We know our lives should be more vital, more productive, but we cannot seem to get back on track.

The solution to this dilemma is found in the second obvious truth from our text: **FRUIT BEARING IS DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE VINE.** **The vine—CHRIST, HIMSELF!**

Donald Grey Barnhouse cites an amazing example of lasting fruitfulness.

In Hampton Court near London, there is a grapevine under glass; it is about 1,000 years old and has but one root which is at least two feet thick. Some of the branches are 200 feet long. Because of skillful cutting and pruning, the vine produces several tons of grapes each year. Even though some of the smaller branches are 200 feet from the main stem, they bear much fruit because they are joined to the vine and allow the life of the vine to flow through them.

If we, the branches, are not bearing much fruit, it may be that we are not feeding as we ought upon the life-giving flow from the vine. WE ARE NOT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN GROWTH!!

LISTEN CAREFULLY... "This is true of a church also!" A cartoon in THE CHURCHMAN magazine sometime back showed a small boy standing before a very large church door, and asking the minister in the door way, ***"Is God home?"*** That is a relevant question for our church or any church. **Is God home?**

Churches bear fruit in direct proportion to the number of people who find God therein the worship, in the fellowship, in the service to the community which the church provides.

But again, this is also true of individuals. Dorothy E. Franklin, a pastor's wife in York, Nebraska notes that there were a considerable number of people chuckling one Sunday morning toward the close of the worship service when her husband announced that in the interest of time which was running short they would only sing one verse of, ***"Take Time to Be Holy."*** That would be funny, if it were not so sad.

We need nourishment-spiritual nourishment-IF WE ARE TO BEAR FRUIT!!

A few years ago, a news article hit the wire service detailing the plight of a Swedish women who had a rare eating disorder. Because of her disease, she was forced to eat thirty pounds of food a day just to stay alive. The previous amount of food she used to eat couldn't sustain her physically. She would die if she simply ate three normal meals. **She needed more.**

Jesus said, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."*** I don't meet many people like that. **For the most part I meet people who have a great emptiness within, a God-shaped emptiness. AN EMPTINESS THEY NEVER LEARN HOW TO FILL.** That is because... ***we have let our relationship with the VINE shrivel and die.***

But there is something else of importance we can learn from this TEXT. **GOD HAS AN INTERESTING WAY OF KEEPING US "PRUNED."** ***ADVERSITY AND SUFFERING ARE TO BE SEEN BY THE BELIEVER AS A PART OF GOD'S PRUNING PROCESS.***

In his fine book, **WHERE IS GOD WHEN IT HURTS?** Philip Yancey points out that the New Testament describes at least five ways in which suffering can yield spiritual growth. In essence, Yancey says that the role of suffering in our faith is that it **"turns us to God"** when we might otherwise **BE WILLING TO "SEEK AND RECEIVE GOD'S HELP."**

THIS IS NOT SAYING...if you are on your way home this morning and a drunk driver crosses the highway and sends you to the hospital or morgue that God is responsible Life happens. But for those who are connected to the vine, life is never meaningless. **Each step of the way, whether pleasant or painful is an event in disciple making.**

That contemporary saint, Corrie Ten Boom, who never lost her connection to the vine, even in Hitler's brutal concentration camp, writes:

Often, I have heard people say, "How good God is! We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic, and look at the lovely weather." Yes, God is good when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister, Betsie, to starve to death before my eyes in a German concentration camp. I remember one occasion when I was very discouraged there. Everything around us was dark, and there was darkness in my heart. I remember telling Betsie that I thought God had forgotten us. "No, Corrie," said Betsie, "He has not forgotten us. Remember His Word: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him." Corrie concludes, "There is an ocean of God's love available there is plenty for everyone. May God grant you never to doubt that victorious love whatever the circumstances."

There is a degree of faith that many of us do not have. That is why we bear so little fruit. For the person connected to the vine, to Christ, adversity and suffering are to be seen as a part of God's pruning process.

This brings us to the final thought on today's TEXT...**GOD IS THE ULTIMATE JUDGE OF THE FRUIT WE BEAR.** An emphasis on bearing fruit could be interpreted as a sermon on "works." It could also reflect the success syndrome of our day. Someone could leave this service today with a load of unresolved guilt because you feel your fruit is not as acceptable as someone else's.

James Herriot, the beloved author of ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL and other best sellers about his life as a veterinarian in rural Scotland, was once being entertained by a wealthy American in Beverly Hills, California. His host had a magnificent home and swimming pool up in the hills. He kept telling Mr. Herriot that in spite of his wealth, his many travels, and his high society experiences, "Somehow I've missed out." Later Mr. Herriot said, "I've stayed put, but thank God, I haven't missed out."

James Herriot had a different standard by which he judged the usefulness of his life. He knew that his humble service as a rural veterinarian was as noble in the eyes of God as the work of the movers and shakers of this world.

God is the ultimate judge of our fruit. It is He who decides what is to be allowed to flourish and what is to be thrown into the fire. **For some of us bearing fruit may simply be a kind word to someone who is hurting. Someone wrote a very painful letter to Ann Landers:**

Dear Ann: *Last December a pal of mine killed himself. Another friend attempted suicide three times in the past 14 months. I tried to take my own life a few years ago.* We all had promising futures and financial security, *but we lacked one thing-the ability to relate to others.* I stopped wanting to kill myself when I realized my death would make a difference. That somebody really cared.

If people want to help, they can. HERE ARE A FEW THINGS EVERYONE CAN DO!! *Smile more, even to people you don't know. Touch people. Look them in the eye. Let them know you are aware they exist. Be concerned about those you work with. Listen when they speak to you. Spend an extra minute. If someone has a problem, just listening means more than you'll ever know.*

To those who are in depression, say this: *"Everybody has highs and lows. Nobody is on top of the world all the time. You'll crawl back up again if you give yourself a chance. Tomorrow will be better."*

You could save a life without realizing it by letting a depressed person know somebody cares...YOU!!

What greater fruit can any child of God bear than the fruit of compassion and kindness?

This then is the heart of the matter. *Christ is the vine, we are the branches.* **OUR JOB IS TO BEAR FRUIT!!** We are not to lose heart when times get difficult. We are to offer those hard times to God and allow him to use them as an act of pruning so that we might bear even more fruit in the days ahead. Only He is the Judge of our fruit.

REMEMBER IN THE DAYS AHEAD...A word of kindness, a deed of compassion, may be judged as Your "BEST FRUIT" of all. SO, GO FORTH AND DO FOR OTHERS ALL THAT YOU CAN DO!! Amen.