

Spiritual Treasure
The Secret of Living

We live in such a media saturated age that it's hard for movie producers to come up with things that are fresh and original. In fact it's so difficult that Hollywood always tries to capitalize on past successes. If a movie was a hit you can be sure there will be a sequel or two.

That's happened again with the film *National Treasure*. The first one was silly but fun and made some money so now we have the less than stellar *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*.

In this movie there's a "President's Book of Secrets" that contains all of America's governmental secrets like Area 51 and the Kennedy assassination. The only one who sees the secrets is the President.

For the next few weeks I want us to think about a different kind of treasure. This one's not National Treasure but Spiritual Treasure. And there's not a Book of Secrets but instead we're going to look at Secrets of the Book.

And the great thing is you don't have to be elected President to know these secrets. The book is the Bible and the secrets are right there for anyone to read.

I want us to start off this three part series by looking at the most foundational secret of the Book. That's the secret of living.

Life is your most precious possession. Right now, you are either wasting your life, spending your life, or investing your life. You are the one who determines which course to follow.

Jesus made this amazing declaration, *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*
John 10:10

Did you catch that? Jesus said "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of."

Let me ask you something this morning. Are you really living today? Are you really living or are you just existing, getting by, tolerating life, putting in your time?

Jesus said there's a thief. Who is he? Ultimately, of course, he's Satan, the enemy of God and good. But the thief always has assistance from people and circumstances.

One man is robbed of life because of impatience. Another person is robbed of abundant life because of selfish indulgences - food, sex, alcohol ... you name it.

There are a lot of thieves that would like to keep us from enjoying Christ's abundant life: Memories of past failures, fears of the future, a feeling that you're not important and that nobody cares.

You know, what's tragic? There's a whole lot of people going through life not really living.

But see, it doesn't have to be that way. In John chapter 15, in the parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus Christ points out the way to the abundant life. I want to challenge you to hear well what Jesus says. We're going to learn the secret of life today.

Turn to John 15 page 956

Before we actually get into our passage for today, let me ask you this. Have you ever wondered why, if heaven is such a fantastic place and this life is so full of sin and hardship, that God just doesn't take us from this world the moment we trust Jesus Christ as our Savior?

The Bible is clear that in this life a person can be sure of heaven. It's not by our good works but it is by faith in Christ.

Ephesians 2:8, 9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Titus 3:5 It's not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

Romans 4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

This is so powerful. According to the Bible the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the one who died for your sins you became a child of God. In other

words this life isn't a proving ground where you try to earn your eternal life by your good works.

Since that is true, why does God leave us here to be tempted by sin and to suffer sickness, sorrow, and all the unpleasant things that go along with this life? Why doesn't He just shoot us out of here the moment we believe?

God wants us here for a reason, and that reason is according to John 15, to bear fruit. God wants to provide something through us as Christians. He doesn't want us to be stagnant. He wants us to be fruitful and He says that as we are fruitful, we will experience life as He intended it to be.

I. The Secret Of Living Is Bearing Fruit

Read verse 1

The last verse in Chapter 14 concludes with Jesus' words *Arise, let us go from here*. This takes place on the last night of Jesus' life. Jesus and His disciples leave the Upper Room at this point.

They've had the last supper, Jesus has washed their feet and now they're going to begin to walk across the city of Jerusalem down into the Kidron Valley which brought them to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

Everywhere, scattered throughout Jerusalem, were vines. In fact vines are such a common sight in Palestine that in the Old Testament the vine is the preeminent symbol of Israel. Over and over again in the Old Testament Israel is portrayed as God's choice vine or God's vineyard.

In fact, look at Isaiah 5 Page 607 Read verses 1-7

Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? Jeremiah 2:21

Ezekiel 15 compares Israel to a vine. So does Ezekiel 19. The prophet Hosea wrote *Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself*. Hosea 10:1 On the Macabean coins Israel was represented by a vine.

The vine was well known then as a symbol of Israel but interestingly this image in the Old Testament is always used as a symbol of Israel's degeneration, rather than her fruitfulness. Isaiah said I did all this work on the vine but it brought forth sour grapes.

Jeremiah calls Israel a “degenerate” and “strange” vine. Hosea calls her “empty” - in other words run to leaves.

So here is a vine planted by God to be fruitful but which is unfruitful. In contrast to this, Jesus says “I am the true vine.” To the disciples this would be a very striking and meaningful statement.

Back to John 15

Jesus was the one, who by his very nature was the true vine who produces fruit for the Father.

I am the true vine, Jesus said, and my Father is the vine dresser. A vine dresser is the guy who is in charge of the vineyard.

Now, if we didn’t read any further we might think that God’s activity as the vinedresser (which includes pruning away of dead wood and cleansing) was to be performed on Jesus, and in one sense of the word this happened.

Hebrews 5:8 is just one of those verses that will really make you think. It says, *Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.* Jesus, in His humanity, learned through the sufferings of life, what it was like to be a human being and have to face the stuff we face.

But that’s not what’s being talked about here. Jesus didn’t need to be purged of dead wood or cleansed from sin. But we do. And we find out as we read along that Jesus Christ is the vine itself but we as believers in Christ are the branches. We are the ones that produce the fruit and we are the ones that the Father cares for.

In verse 2 Jesus explains.. **Read verse 2**

There are two things that the Father does as he cares for His vine. First, he takes away every branch that doesn’t bear fruit. Usually this has been understood to be a purging away of dead branches just like in verse 6 where they are cast into the fire and are burned.

I looked in about eight English translations and they all said something like “take away” or “cut off.” I think this is a misunderstanding and it comes from the words “he takes away.”

The Greek word here, *airo*, has 4 basic meanings which are: 1) to lift up or pick up 2) to lift up figuratively 3) to lift up with the added thought of lifting in order to carry it away

and 4) simply to remove.

By translating this word “take away” the translators have obviously chosen the 4th meaning, probably to make it conform with verse 6. But really the verse makes a whole lot more sense if the first, most basic meaning is taken. “Every branch in me that doesn’t bear fruit he lifts up.” That is, to keep it from trailing on the ground.

This verb is consistently used in verses that say someone lifted something, like a mat or a sleeping pallet. It’s used in John 11:41 where it says, *Jesus lifted up His eyes*. He didn’t remove His eyes. He lifted them up.

Think about this, the emphasis of the opening section of this parable that Jesus is telling is the care of the vine by the Father. it would be really strange then if the first thing mentioned is the carrying away of unproductive branches.

It makes a whole lot more sense that the vine dresser first lifts the branches up so that they might be better exposed to the sun and so the fruit will develop properly.

Second of all, grapes aren’t like pumpkins. They don’t grow lying on the ground. They have to hang free. And any branch that trails on the ground is unproductive. when you see a vineyard you always see the vines strung up on arbors or poles.

Thirdly, lifting up gives the proper sequence of events. First the vine is lifted up to raise it to the sun and air. Then the vinedresser prunes away the unproductive elements.

We are the branches and God wants us to be fruitful. He lifts us up closer to Himself.

The second thing the Father is said to do in His care of the vine is to prune it. In Greek this word is *kathairo* (it’s where we get our English word “catharsis”) and it means “to cleanse,” “to make clean” or “purify.”

Most people read that verse and immediately think of pruning as something painful. God has to bring affliction and chastisement and painful discipline into my life. Well, God may have to use drastic measures in your life if that’s what is necessary to make us fruitful but that is not what the Jesus is referring to here.

Notice **Read verse 3**

The Palestinian vineyard keepers were organic farmers. They didn’t spray pesticide on their grapes because they didn’t have any. Instead they cleansed the branches of insects, moss, and parasites by hand.

How does God remove parasites, moss, and insects - the hinderances to spiritual growth and fruitfulness from us? Through the Word of God - the Bible.

God is working with every branch to remove anything which is spiritually detrimental. He's stripping away bad habits, rearranging priorities, changing values, making us totally devoted followers of Jesus Christ. And He does it through the power of the Bible.

So, first He's lifting us up. He's giving us a proper attitude towards him of love, devotion. Then He's stripping away the unproductive elements.

Now that order is important because if we just follow a lot of rules in our Christian lives without being lifted up to God in our attitude we usually end up like the Pharisees.

The Pharisees of Jesus time had a problem because they thought they were better than everybody else. They imagined themselves to be very saintly while the rest of the people were corrupt.

They tried to follow God's rules for life without really knowing or being close to God. There's a lot of Christians who pride themselves in the don'ts in their life without ever developing a loving relationship with Jesus Christ.

We need the standards. We need the don'ts but what should happen is that we first of all draw near to God and become productive. After that as the harmful things begin to leave our lives we hardly feel them going and we don't become proud that they are gone. It's just like, "Hey, we're moving ahead here. Those things are bypassed."

A girl never has to be asked to stop playing with dolls. When she's young she plays with them. When she gets older and starts noticing the young men around her, her interest in dolls fades. They become kid's stuff. Why? Because someone has told her "Hey, you're too old to play with dolls?" No Because she's moved onto a higher sphere of experience.

As we grow close to Jesus Christ and become more and more familiar with His Word we move on to higher spheres of Christian experience. A lot of those things that we used to count as very important in our lives that were actually hinderances to our fruitfulness fall away and we don't even care that they are gone. In fact, we are happy about it.

So, first of all God lifts us up so that we can become fruitful and then He cleanses us through the truth of the Bible so that we can become more fruitful.

Why does God want us around? To really live. What's the secret of living? Producing spiritual fruit.

If you know Christ this morning, the reason that God saved you is that you would produce spiritual fruit in this hungry world. We are living in a hungry world where people are starving for spiritual reality.

That's why people turn to religions and causes. It's why they go after sex and drugs. There's a spiritual void they're trying to fill.

The branch doesn't bear fruit for the branch to eat, it bears fruit for others to eat. God has put you where you are to accomplish His special purpose. There is fruit to be produced where you are that nobody else can produce but you. Accept the responsibility, and privilege of being one of His branches.

Now we've talked a lot about fruit that God wants us to produce and what God's doing to enable us to bear that fruit but so far we haven't really touched upon what form that fruit is going to take.

Romans 1:13 Page 999

1) Introducing others to Christ and helping them grow is fruit. The apostle who's writing this letter says "I wanted to come to the city of Rome for some fruit."

As Christ's life flows through us as branches we will share that life naturally with those around us. Somethings may hinder us like fear or lack of knowledge. The key is to step out on faith. It's to trust God for the results. We don't need to have the answer to every single question people might ask us about the Bible before we talk about what God has done for us.

Along with that we have a Go & Tell ministry where we'll train you how to be even more fruitful.

Romans 6:22 Page 1003

Practical holiness in your life is spiritual fruit. Holiness isn't same brittle kind of piety like the Pharisees practiced. Holiness is the beauty and the character of God displayed in our every day life.

Holy living doesn't mean going around with your nose up in the air judging other people. it means growth in character so that we become more like Jesus Christ. You cannot manufacture holiness. Holiness comes from the inside out. It's the fruit we bear through branches of the vine.

A third kind of fruit He enables us to bear is the sharing of what we possess.

Romans 15:25-28 Page 1011

An apostle named Paul had gathered a missionary offering from the Gentiles for the poor saints in Jerusalem and he called it fruit. In I Corinthians 9 Paul was establishing his right as the one who started that church and ministered to the people of being paid for his work. And he says in verse 7 *Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?*

And then finally over in Philippians 4 he is thanking the people at Philippi for sending him money for missionary support and he says,
Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Philippians 4:17

In other words he says "I'm glad that you sent me money not just because I needed it but because in doing so you are laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

Have you experienced the joy of giving? The secret of really living is bearing fruit and part of bearing fruit is giving back to God a share of what He's given you.

Christian character is a 4th kind of fruit and its described in **Galatians 5:22, 23 Page 1037**

The world has it's substitutes for these qualities but it can't duplicate them. The culture manufactures entertainment and even happiness, but it can't manufacture that deep joy that comes from Jesus Christ.

Happiness is an emotion dependent on circumstances. Joy is an attitude of the heart that has nothing to do with how we feel emotionally.

You can get a prescription for sleeping pills and go to the drug store and purchase sleep but you can't purchase peace. And it's interesting, isn't it, that the drug most widely used for suicide attempts is sleeping pills. People are trying to escape the pressures and the tensions of this world and gain some lasting peace in death.

The closer we come to Jesus Christ through His word and prayer and, as Colossians 1:10 says, *bearing fruit in every good work* then the more Galatians 5:22, 23 will be true in our lives.

The 5th area of fruit in our life should be praising and thanking God.

Hebrew 13:15 Page 1071

In the Old Testament the worshippers brought the fruit of their fields for a sacrifice to God. The New Testament worshiper brings the fruit of his lips. By our words we praise

and glorify God.

Does it seem unnatural to you to talk about God to people, especially those who don't know Him personally? Our words need to be the fruit of our union with Jesus Christ, that's going to make the difference. If praise seems unnatural to you than maybe you better check out your relationship to the vine, something is hindering you there. If we are growing in Christ, God will produce the fruit of the lips and others will be able to eat it.

And I'm talking about some phony televangelist type praise the Lord, hallelujah, praise Jesus expressions. I'm talking about a thanking God that's coming from the heart.

The secret of living is fruitfulness. If these things characterize your life: speaking to others about Christ, holiness, giving, fruit of the Spirit, and praising God then not only will you be experiencing life the way God wants you to but you'll be accomplishing what God left you here to accomplish.

I. The Secret Of Living Is Bearing Fruit

II. The Secret of Fruitfulness Is Abiding

Back to John 15 Read verses 4-5

You don't walk into a vineyard and see all the branches fighting to break away from the vines. They're resting in the vines because that's where they get their strength. That's where they get their nourishment. To abide (or to continue or dwell) in the Bible, means to maintain fellowship, communion.

Jesus said, "You are already clean through the Word, now don't ever break off conscious communion with me." To abide in Christ means to maintain a daily active faith in Him, to recognize your dependence on Him as a branch to a vine. No branch bears any fruit in isolation.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior then your union with Jesus Christ gives you the power to live a godly and fruitful life in this world. The only way to be truly happy in Jesus is to be fully surrendered to Him abiding, emptied of all things and filled with His Spirit, His love, His divine presence.

I've met a lot of Christians that complain that they don't have the joy that other Christians have. Here's what I think. I think it's because they fail to place the lack of joy at the right source. They aren't filled with "joy unspeakable and full of glory" because their connection with Jesus is so meager.

They think if life would just go their way then they'd have joy.

One of the people on my list of personal heroes is Peggy Buie. Peggy was Lisa Eden's mom. Peggy had a form of cancer that took years to fully develop. And as things got progressively worse Peggy Bowie had to wear a morphine pump strapped to her waist to dull the increasing pain.

Peggy loved to teach children the Bible. She and her husband Hank came in every week and taught kids. The children had no idea that Miss Peggy was in constant pain. All they knew was she radiated the love of Jesus to them.

Peggy Bowie was a woman who was abiding in Christ.

The fruit that brings glory to God comes from a heart wholly surrendered to Jesus Christ, doing all things through Him and to glorify His name.

Abiding in Christ is the secret of fruit bearing. Walking in fellowship with Jesus Christ is a divine imperative if we were going to produce fruit because He is the source of all fruit bearing.

Abiding in Him starts with knowing Him personally. If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin you can do it today, right where you sit. *For by grace are you saved through faith.* You can trust Him for the gift of eternal life - He died for your sins - do you believe it?

If you have trusted Him - are you really living? God didn't create you and Christ didn't die for you, so that you could go through life getting. God created you and Christ purchased you so that you might invest your life in giving. Jesus said, *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.* Mark 8:35

If you refuse to bear fruit you will miss the true meaning of life. If you yield to Jesus and permit His life to create His fruit through you, then you will really live.

Are you willing to be a branch? Tell Him you are. Are you willing for His life to work in through you? Then tell Him.

By an act of faith yield yourself to Jesus Christ so that you can begin to produce fruit, so you can begin to fulfill your eternal purpose for living this life.

And as you bear fruit it will be clearly beyond any thing that you could produce and God will get all the glory.