

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/20/02 Brad Brandt

John 15:9-13 "The Evidence of Fruitfulness" **

Main Idea: According to John 15:9-13, if we're experiencing fruitfulness in our lives, it will show up in two areas.

A look back at what we've already seen in verses 1-8...

1. Fruitfulness requires pruning (1-3).
2. Fruitfulness requires abiding (4-8).
 - ↳ It takes contact (7a).
 - ↳ It takes communication (7b).
 - ↳ It takes commitment (8).
- I. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience intimacy with Christ (9-11).
 - A. It will affect my aim (9).
 1. We have received His love.
 2. We are to remain in His love.
 - B. It will affect my actions (10).
 1. When I obey His Word, I am continuing in His love.
 2. I am also keeping myself in a position where I can enjoy His blessings.
 - C. It will affect my attitude (11).
 1. Joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.
 2. Joy is connected to objective truth.
 3. Joy is something Jesus wants us to experience.
- II. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience intimacy with one another (12-13).
 - A. We have a mandate (12a).
 1. To be right with Christ, I must love you.
 2. If I don't love you, I am not right with Him.
 - B. We have a model (12b-13).
 1. Jesus gave His life for us.
 2. We're to do the same for each other.

The Bottom Line: Am I experiencing true intimacy in my life?

Would you describe your life as being *fruitful*? I didn't say *productive*. I said *fruitful*. There is a difference.

Most of us are pretty busy people. We're active, and from time to time we may get this nagging sense that something seems to be missing. So we run faster, and harder, and longer. This whirlwind syndrome can creep into the way we approach our Christian life, too. We can be doing all the right things--reading our Bible, saying our prayers, showing up for church, the whole bit--yet we have this nagging sense that something's missing. And it is.

What's missing? And how do we get "it" back? We find the answer by considering what Jesus taught in John 15. If you want to do more than merely go through the motions in life, you must take heed to Jesus' instruction about *The Fruitful Life* in John 15.

A Look Back at What We've Seen: When Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 15, His earthly ministry was nearly over. Soon He would complete His redemptive work and return to heaven. His followers would not see Him again until He returned.

In John 15, Jesus tells His disciples what life will be like in the interum period, the time between His first and second coming. To describe what life would be like, Jesus used a common image—a vine. Verses 1-8 are an

extended metaphor, a visual illustration depicting the Christian life.

Verse 1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."

Verse 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches."

The vine image is a beautiful picture of the Christian life. But what really does it mean? I think commentator D.A. Carson is right when he observes, "Few passages in the Scripture are better known, at a superficial level, than the first few verses of John 15."

What does Jesus want us to get out of this picture, this image? Two weeks ago, we learned from verses 1-4 what's required to be fruitful, two things:

1. *Fruitfulness requires pruning (1-3).*

2. *Fruitfulness requires abiding (4-8).* The pruning will occur, guaranteed. It's the Father's task. He will do exactly what's needed to prepare us to produce fruit. What's our responsibility? It's to abide in Christ, to allow His life to be reproduced in us.

Last week, from verses 5-8 we learned how to reach our potential in Christ. If we are going to "remain" or "abide" in Christ, it takes three things...

▫ It takes contact. "If you remain *in Me*," Jesus said (7).

▫ It takes communication. "If you remain in me, and *my words remain in you*," the Master continued (7).

▫ It takes commitment. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (8)." To achieve our potential, we must live with this ambition, this *commitment*—to *glorify God*. We don't exist for ourselves, but for Him.

But what should all this talk about a vine and branches and fruit and abiding mean practically in our Christian lives?

We find out beginning in verse 9. In verses 9-16, Jesus gives us His own exposition of the vine analogy in verses 1-8. Verses 9-16 interpret the meaning of verses 1-8. In fact, verses 9-16 reveal what it is that is missing from so many of our lives that's robbing us of fruitfulness. In this section Jesus gives us a portrait of what He's been talking about, a portrait of a fruitful Christian.

We're going to take a look at that picture this morning. According to John 15:9-13, if we're experiencing fruitfulness in our lives, it will show up in two areas.

I. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience intimacy with Christ (9-11).

What do I mean by intimacy? To be intimate is to be near, to be close. Right here is one of the most baffling and mind-boggling truths of Scripture. The God of the universe invites us to experience intimacy with Him. He wants us to be close to Him.

A lot of people don't know God in those terms. To them, He is only an Awesome Being, one who is far off. He is mighty. He is high and lifted up.

Granted, God is that. Yet listen to what He says about Himself in Isaiah 57:15, "For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, *but also with him*

who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

He offers to us intimacy. We need to know that if we want to grasp what it means to be fruitful. Fruitfulness is not the result of living according to a list of do's and don'ts. It's not mechanical. It's not going through routine. Fruitfulness is linked to a relationship. Fruit is the evidence of an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Consider Jesus' words in verses 9-11, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

In these three verses, Jesus emphasizes His love (9), His commands (10), and His joy (11). He also reveals that if I am experiencing intimacy with Him, it will affect my life in three ways.

A. It will affect my aim (9). "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." Did you catch that? How much does Jesus love His own? How much does He love us? He loves us as God the Father loves Him. Jesus loves us with the same type of love.

Usually, when we think of God's love, we think of His love for *us*. And certainly, He loves us (John 3:16). God the Father does love the world. And He does love His Church. Yet don't miss this. God the Father loves His Son.

How much? John 17:24 says He loved His Son before the foundation of the world. John 3:35 reveals that because the Father loves the Son, He put all things in the Son's hands. John 5:20 indicates that because of His love, the Father revealed all things to the Son.

The Father's love for His Son is eternal. It's without beginning and ending. It never fails. And it's the same type of love we can experience! (see also--Jn 17:26)

Don't miss the connection. Jesus said, "In the same way that the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." Think of the implications.

It breaks my heart to see the consequences people face when they look for "love" in the wrong places. A young lady compromises God's standard to gain the acceptance of a young man who says he "loves" her. A young man participates in sexual activity which God intended for marriage, convincing himself, "This is love."

Young people, don't settle for cheap substitutes. Jesus loves you. He really does! "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you."

Now a question. What's our responsibility in light of His love? Jesus tells us at the end of verse 9, "Now remain in my love." Notice the connection Jesus makes...

1. *We have received His love.* Therefore...

2. *We are to remain in His love.* Please observe that the word is an imperative, a command. It's not an option. *Remain* ("continue" in the KJV). It's the same Greek word in verse 4. We're to remain (abide) in Christ. We're to remain (abide) in His love.

But what does it mean to remain in Jesus' love? You say, "It sounds like this abiding in Jesus' love is kind of a mystical thing." Is it? No, it's not. It has to do with our *aim* in life. Abiding in His love is to be our aim.

Think of it this way. In verse 9, love is like a *sphere*. Suppose I drew a circle on the floor. When I'm inside the circle, I'm inside the sphere of Christ's love. When I move outside of the circle, I've moved outside of the

sphere of His love. Inside this circle is where we can taste the fruit, the benefits of Christ's love. As long as I'm in the sphere, I'm okay. But when I move out of the circle, I forfeit those benefits.

So Jesus says to us, "I want to shower you with the blessings of My love. Make sure you keep yourselves in the place where you can enjoy these benefits."

Picture a greenhouse in a vast desert. Imagine that you are a plant. Life inside the greenhouse is luscious and fruitful. Outside it's barren. But suppose you said, "I'm tired of living in here. I want to go out in the world. I'm tired of the Gardener making all the decisions. I want to go where I want to go. I want to do what I want to do. I want to be free!"

Let me ask you. Is that freedom? No. That's folly. Why? Because that choice will result in barrenness and destruction.

See the parallel? The Father is our gardener. He has designed where and how we should live if we want to enjoy fruit. When we stay in the greenhouse, when we stay within the boundaries of Christ's love, we can enjoy the blessings of His fruit.

And when we have intimacy with Christ, abiding in His love will be our aim. You say, "Just what are those 'boundries' you're talking about?" Good question! Jesus answers it in verse 10. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

If I am experiencing intimacy with Christ, first it will affect my *aim*. Secondly...

B. It will affect my actions (10). "If you obey my commands," Jesus said. What are the boundaries that mark off the sphere of Christ's love? Christ's commands. The commandments of Christ are like the walls of the greenhouse. They protect us. They guard us. They keep us in the place where we can enjoy the wonderful benefits of Christ's love.

Intimacy with Christ affects our aim—our aim ought to be to abide in His love. It also affects our actions. What did Jesus say we are to do with His commands? Obey them. And what is true if we obey His commands? "You will remain in my love," He said.

Notice that. Abiding in the love of Christ is not some abstract or mystical experience. It's very concrete and measurable. Simply put...

1. *When I obey His Word, I am continuing in His love. What's more...*
2. *I am also keeping myself in a position where I can enjoy His blessings.*

The key to intimacy, then, is obedience.

At this point I can hear the objection, "Wait a minute! If you command love, it's not love, is it?" To answer that question, let's take a look at the divine model. That's exactly what Jesus points to at the end of verse 10, "Just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Can true love be commanded? Yes, because biblical love is not fundamentally a feeling, but an act of the will. Jesus loved His Father, so what did He do? First, He obeyed Him. In so doing, He remained in His love.

Have you ever pondered this truth? Jesus obeyed the Father. He didn't do His own thing. He kept the Father's commands. Listen to Jesus' own words:

John 4:34 "My food," said Jesus, "is *to do the will of him* who sent me and to finish his work."

John 8:29 "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for *I always do what pleases him.*"

John 12:49 "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me *commanded me* what to say and how to say it."

John 14:31 "The world must learn that I love the Father and that *I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*"

Ultimately, when facing the cross, He prayed, "Not My will, but Your will be done (Mk 14:36)." We read in Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Did you catch the connection? Jesus obeyed His Father. His people obey Him. Obedience is a vital aspect of abiding. In order to be obedient, we have to die to ourselves. We make a choice to submit our will to His will.

The Bible presents Jesus as our Redeemer and our Savior, and He certainly is that. But He's also something else. He's our model. He's our example. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, *just as I have obeyed my Father's* commands and remain in his love."

Do you feel close to the Savior? If not, take inventory right here. Are you obeying His commands? Are you treating your spouse the way He said? Are you honoring your parents? Are you giving the first-fruits of your income to Him? Are you harboring bitterness towards anyone? Do you have any known sin in your life? Have you been looking at things He forbids?

To remain in His life we must *obey Him*. We're not talking about earning His life. He loved us when we were unlovely and gave His life as a sacrifice for us on the cross, and then conquered death to save us. We become His people simply by placing our whole trust in Him. And as His people we are secure in His love (John 10:28).

But to remain in His love—to remain in the "greenhouse" and experience the blessings of His abiding presence—we must obey Him.

If I am experiencing intimacy with Christ, it will affect my life in a third way. Intimacy with Christ affects my aim (verse 9), my actions (verse 10), and...

C. It will affect my attitude (11). "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." The key word is *joy*.

I find it staggering as I read these words how little Jesus thought of Himself, and how much He thought of His disciples. Remember, this was His hour of greatest need. Soon, while on the cross, He would endure the horrid penalty of hell. Yet there in the upper room, His focus was on others.

Here's #3 again. Intimacy with the Savior affects our attitude in life. Jesus told His disciples His words were the key that would unlock two doors of opportunity: Door #1—that My joy might remain in you; and door #2—that your joy might be full.

A person who abides in Christ experiences joy. Unfortunatley, there seem to be a lot of *joyless Christians* these days.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., was a member of the U.S. Supreme Court for 30 years. His mind, wit and work earned him the unofficial title of "the greatest justice since John Marshall." At one point in his life, Justice Holmes explained his choice of a career by saying: "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I

knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers."

Do you want to know how to experience true joy in your life? Based on verse 11, I'd like to make three observations about joy.

1. *Joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.* "My joy may be in you," Jesus said. Joy is a by-product of an intimate walk with Christ. Jesus doesn't want us to settle for a deficient joy. The world offers a counterfeit joy. But it's like fizz in a can of pop. It doesn't last. People can take away my happiness, but they can't touch my joy. Bill Hull writes, "Joy is a supernatural sense of well-being that comes from knowing that we are pleasing to God."

2. *Joy is connected to objective truth.* "I have told you *this* ["these things" in the KJV] so that my joy may be in you." Joy is not a sentimental feeling. It's not something we work up. It's connected to "this," to "these things," to the truth Jesus is speaking.

3. *Joy is something Jesus wants us to experience.* "That your joy may be *complete*." Jesus doesn't dangle joy in front of us like the proverbial carrot on the string in front of the horse. He has joy (Heb 12:2). He offers us joy.

Listen. If joy is found in Jesus and nowhere else, then the world can only imagine what real joy is. Only disciples of Christ are candidates for true joy.

C. S. Lewis observed, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Do you have joy in your life? True joy belongs to those who walk intimately with Christ.

Let me summarize what we've seen so far. If we are going to experience intimacy with Christ, there are three things He offers with which we must come to grips in our lives—His love, His commands, and His joy. My aim must be to remain in His love. My actions must be governed by His commands. And my attitude must demonstrate His joy.

Psalm 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Jim Elliot, martyred missionary to the Auca Indians, once prayed, "Lord, make my way prosperous, not that I may achieve high station, but that my life may be an exhibit to the value of knowing God."

How much value do you place on intimacy with Christ in your life? Can you say, as did Fanny Crosby...?

Thou my everlasting portion, more than friend or life to me;

All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with Thee.

Close to Thee, close to Thee, Close to Thee, close to Thee;

All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with Thee.

This morning we're looking at a portrait of a fruitful Christian. The first mark of a fruitful life is intimacy with Christ. But there's a second mark.

II. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience intimacy with one another (12-13).

If I'm going to enjoy the kind of life that pleases God, I must not only be right with Him but also with His other children. Why? For two reasons...

A. We have a mandate (12a). "My command is this: Love each other."

It wasn't the first time Jesus gave the eleven this command that night. He earlier told them in John 13:34-35, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22). Love is to be the trademark of Jesus' followers. We have a responsibility to love each other. And know this. If you want to experience intimacy with Christ, you have to accept this mandate, and fulfill your responsibility to your brethren in Christ. Stated personally...

1. *To be right with Christ, I must love you.*

2. *If I don't love you, I am not right with Him.* "My command is this," Jesus said, "Love each other."

How much are we to love each other? Notice, in addition to a mandate...

B. We have a model (12b-13). "Love each other *as I have loved you.*" Wow, what a high standard! We are to love as He loved. Remember the context. He is the vine. We are the branches. He wants to reproduce His life, His love, in and through us. We ought to resemble Him. By the way we treat each other, we ought to give evidence of His presence in our lives.

Now answer this. What's the greatest demonstration of love a person can give? Here's Jesus' answer. Verse 13—"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Obviously, that's exactly what Jesus Himself would do in a matter of hours. Lay down His life for His friends. But His challenge to us is this. We're to show the same kind of selfless love to each other. Let that sink in...

1. *Jesus gave His life for us.* Here He tells us...

2. *We're to do the same for each other.*

Paul referred to the model in Ephesians 5:2, "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." The apostle John made the same connection between divine and human love in 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

You say, "Is it hard to love that way?" Actually, it's more than hard. It's impossible—on our own strength, that is. To love others as Christ loved us requires supernatural strength. And that's exactly what we have when we abide in Christ. His life flows through us!

D.A. Carson says it well, "The believer who hungers for deep intimacy with Jesus Christ must follow this new command. It is not easy. The unlovely ones in the brotherhood bring out the worst in me. The whiners get on my nerves. The gossips and the arrogant, the immature and the silly, conspire to drain my resolve. But the answer is to remember that the branch can do nothing apart from the vine, and that Jesus himself loved his friends, his unlovely, whining, gossipy, arrogant, immature and silly friends, enough to die for them."

My friends, this is Christianity 101. If we truly love God, we must love each other. Not just tolerate, but *love*. I must reach out and get involved in sacrificial ways to meet the needs of my brothers and sisters—like Jesus did with me. No it's not easy, but it's absolutely essential. It's our mandate. It's what our Savior modeled.

It's hard to fathom this kind of love, but perhaps the following story can help. "Charles Dickens, in the classic story *A Tale of Two Cities*, tells us about the character Charles Darnay, who was caught up in the swirl of the French Revolution. Although personally blameless, he was unjustly found guilty. While in prison to await the guillotine, a friend resembling him by the name of Sydney Carton secretly drugged him, exchanged clothes, and took his place at the guillotine the next morning, while friends removed the drugged body of Darnay. His life was spared because his friend died for him."

In John 15 Jesus is saying that kind of love—sacrificial love—should be common amongst us. We ought to be known as people who day by day give our lives for the good of others. We live in a world of takers. We're to be known as *givers*.

But let's be honest. An observation by John MacArthur hits close to home, "Some of us don't love others enough to give our time to someone, let alone our lives. Sometimes we neglect to share our love with our neighbors who need to know the truth of Jesus Christ, or minister our gifts to other believers who aren't growing, or give to needs around the world where money is needed for ministries to be carried on. Some of us haven't even learned to live for others, let alone die for them."

Love each other as I have loved you.

If you have a brother or sister in Christ you are giving the cold shoulder, you are violating this command. If you hear of needs in your church family and quickly respond without praying about it, "Well, I'm not going to get involved. I've got my own agenda," you, too, are violating this command. And if you are violating this command, you won't experience intimacy with Christ. Intimacy with Christ and intimacy with each other go hand in hand. I cannot be close to Christ and live as an island.

You say, "I think you you're exaggerating." Well, then, listen to how blunt John was about this subject in 1 John 4:7-12: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ *Whoever does not love does not know God*, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, *since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

Did you catch those final words? If we love one another, what is true? God "lives" in us—the Greek word is *meno*. God *abides* in us.

This morning, we've seen the portrait of a fruitful Christian. Fruitfulness is related to intimacy. It shows up in two areas. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience intimacy with Christ and intimacy with one another. Let's ask ourselves a "bottom line" question.

The Bottom Line: Am I experiencing true intimacy in my life?

We've learned how it can occur. And why it must. Let's begin today.