

MONDAY, 8/5

Read Genesis 1:26-30

The creation story tells us that we were made in the likeness of God. Our being made in God's image was purposeful. We were created to serve as His representatives in the world. While God is more than sufficient to rule over the world, He chose to do so through us. God chose to invite us into a partnership where He would rule in and alongside us. As a result, we were given God's authority in order to exercise His power. God's power allows us to carry out our calling to represent Him to His creation. Stop and think about that for a moment. That is truly a remarkable thing. God wants to work with and through you. What an incredible responsibility and privilege!

Now as the story goes, we squandered the privilege of working in partnership with God. We abused the powers God gave us and strove to be God rather than with Him. As a result, we lost the ability to represent God--that is, until Jesus came.

It was Jesus who reconciled us to God. Jesus brought healing to our brokenness. By His death, He destroyed sin's power over us. Jesus, being raised to new life, has enabled us to receive a new identity as God's children. These promises are ours if we identify with Jesus.

Through Christ we are welcomed back into God's family. This means that the image and responsibility we had forfeited with sin has been reclaimed. Through Christ, we have regained not only our calling to be God's representatives in the world, but we have also been called to be fruitful again.

God wants to work in you and with you to bear fruit. He desires to be in partnership with you. I wonder if you will be a partner with Him as He works to restore our broken world?

Prayer: *"God, thank You for desiring to work in and alongside me. I want to partner with You. Amen."*

TUESDAY, 8/6

Read John 15:5

The purpose of a vine is to produce fruit. It isn't a forced or awkward process. It is the most natural thing for a vine--and branches connected to the vine--to bear fruit.

We sometimes make bearing fruit for the Lord so difficult. We imagine having to do unimaginably big things. The picture we have in our minds is so far out there that we don't often act upon it. We imagine having to expend energy we don't have. The truth is bearing fruit isn't as daunting as we might think. Bearing fruit looks like serving at VBS or going on a youth mission trip. It's sharing your journey of faith with others so as to disciple them. It looks like growing in generosity so the reach of the church is broadened. It looks like serving in a ministry at the church or in the community.

Of course, it is only possible for a branch to bear fruit if it is connected to the vine. When a branch is cut off from the vine, it is no longer attached to the vital resources it needs to produce fruit or even sustain life. As a result, it will wither and die.

In much the same way, Jesus says that we cannot bear fruit apart from Him. We will bear fruit only if we are in relationship with Jesus. That is because fruitfulness comes from being in partnership with Jesus. When we are connected to Jesus in this way, fruitfulness is the natural outcome. It's a result of His pouring Himself into our lives, supplying us with the resources needed to fulfill our calling to bear fruit.

I want you to hear that bearing fruit isn't up to only you. It is Jesus who works in us. We are to make ourselves resources for the Kingdom. Before we are called to do for Jesus, we are called to be in relationship with Him. It's out of that relationship that He works in and through us.

Prayer: *"Jesus, bear fruit in my life as I stay connected to You. Amen."*

WEDNESDAY, 8/7

Read John 15:8

Being a disciple of Jesus means imitating Him. We are students of Jesus who is teaching us how to live into the new life and identity He has given us. As students of Jesus, we are called to pattern our lives after Him. That means not only doing what He did, but also valuing what He valued.

John's gospel makes it clear that Jesus' chief value was to bring glory to His Father. It's the whole reason why He came to earth. Everything He did was to bring glory to God. His passion to see His Father receive glory took Him all the way to the cross. Knowing the glory His Father would receive from His sacrifice, Hebrews 12:2 states that Jesus, "who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame." The writer of Hebrews says this spirit means we should "set our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Since Jesus is our example, we ought to desire to bring glory to God as He did. Setting our eyes upon Jesus means sharing in His passion to bring glory to God.

Jesus says we bring glory to God by bearing fruit. Now the fruit Jesus bore was the work He had done in making disciples. Jesus had effectively established a community of faith and poured His life into His disciples. In this way, they would continue to bear fruit and bring the Father glory as Jesus Himself did.

I think this is the fruit Jesus wants us to bear. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven following the resurrection, Jesus told His disciples to go and make disciples of every nation. This is the call of the church. I believe God wants you to become a disciple-maker, not just a disciple. A disciple is one who is in the process of becoming a disciple-maker. Disciple-makers help others share in Jesus' life, and this is what leads to the Father's glory. I wonder if you are on track to becoming a disciple-maker?

Prayer: *"Lord, continue to work in me so that I can become a disciple-maker. Amen."*

THURSDAY, 8/8

Read Psalm 1:1-3

The books of Psalms and Proverbs are always contrasting wickedness and righteousness. The psalmist says that the truly blessed person doesn't practice wickedness but righteousness.

Righteousness means being in right relationship with God. It means being made right with God through faith. As we receive a new identity as God's children, we then begin to live into that new identity through being obedient to Him. Being in right relationship to God means that we are continually supplied with what we need for growth and fruit bearing.

In the ancient world, streams were considered one of the purest sources of water. They were often called "living water" because they were constantly moving and thus not as susceptible to stagnation. Jesus likened Himself to the Living Water. When our lives are grounded in Christ, we can expect to be supplied with all that is needed for growth. As we grow toward maturity, we will begin to bear fruit for the Kingdom.

Delight in God's word and meditation leads to a planting of our lives in God. It immerses us in the very life of Christ. It sends our roots deep into Jesus, who empowers our transformation. As we become more like Jesus, we will begin to do what Jesus did. We will bear fruit for God's Kingdom.

Another way of thinking about this is that fruit begins at the root. If you aren't rooted in Jesus, you cannot expect to bear fruit. If your roots run deep into Him, you can expect that He will work powerfully through you. Is your life firmly rooted in Jesus?

Prayer: *"Holy Spirit, sink my roots into the life of God that I might bear fruit for Him. Amen."*

FRIDAY, 8/9

Read Colossians 1:10-12

Paul writes a letter celebrating the Colossians' faith and love for God's people. He encourages them to do everything they can to continue to live lives worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way. It is here that Paul outlines the promise of our living within the Divine Rhythm. When we take the time to reflect on our circumstances, learn from our mistakes, and seek counsel where needed, we can pare back the parts of our lives that are unhealthy and that prevent us from seeking a closer connection to God. When we allow ourselves to rest and recover after a difficult season in our lives, we can build up our strength, reinforce our resolve, and move forward with our lives in a healthier place. Our experience on this path makes us better able to handle the changes and challenges we will face. Walking this path teaches us how to love as we have been loved by God and trust as we have trusted God. It teaches us to forgive as we have been forgiven so that our actions can inspire the actions of others.

The promise in this process is that in doing so, we are better able to know and love our God, know and love ourselves, and know and love others with more compassion. We are better able to be grateful for all that we have, and in that grateful place, be set free from our sins and take part in the "inheritance that is granted to God's holy people".

Prayer: *"God, help us to live to the beat of your Divine Rhythm. Teach us to love as you love. Amen."*

SATURDAY, 8/10

Read Philippians 1:11

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of the joy he feels about how well they are doing in their faith. Still he encourages them to continue on that right path, saying that he wishes them even greater insight into what is right and prays that they "will be filled with the fruit of righteousness" that can only come from Jesus Christ for the glory and praise to God. If they were doing so well, why does he continue to remind them to do better?

Even then, Paul knew that it was easy to get distracted and that the path chosen in one moment may far differ from the path lived in another. One of those distractions is actually a requirement for a fruitful life--rest. Though the average adult needs between 7-9 hours of sleep each night, about one third of us sleep far less than what we need. When we haven't taken the time to rest, we can get caught up in the details of our current circumstances. We can focus more on the tactics to move past the events of the day and lose focus on the overall strategy for living a fruitful life as a whole. Paul is more concerned with a continued priority placed on fruitful living than he is with the success of one fruit-filled moment. Even when our days are easier to handle, we still have to be intentional in all that we do, keeping the bigger picture in mind.

Prayer: *"Holy Spirit, keep my intentions unrelenting. Open my heart to receive Your Presence. Amen."*

SUNDAY, 8/11

Read Matthew 3:7-12

In this passage, we see John the Baptist introducing the coming of Christ. People came from miles around to confess their sins and be baptized in the River Jordan. Among these were Jesus' largest opposition, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Witnessing for Christ, John calls them out for who they are, a "brood of vipers". He warns that there are consequences for their actions far beyond anything they have ever known. Their genealogy, their history, their strongly held beliefs can't protect them from the oncoming judgment--unless they produce fruit that will provide evidence that their hearts and their lives have indeed changed. Only then will they be baptized. John warns that there is One who is coming who is even more powerful, who holds the "shovel...to sift the wheat from the husks."

John's message to some of Christ's biggest opposition is clear. He says, "I am merely the messenger, yet I see you for who you are. The One who comes after me knows the difference between those who are consistent in what they say or do and who are faithful to the scriptures in their pursuit of a connection to God--and those who are not. Those who are consistently faithful in constant pursuit of knowing God--these are the fruitful ones.

His warning reminds us that God sees us clearly for who we are, the good and the bad. Given all the sin and cultural influences around us, it is easy to say the right things. Are we who we say we are? Living a fruitful life is a life-long process of discernment, of practice, of rest and restoration, of prayer and other disciplines. How fruitful is your life today?

Prayer: *"Gracious God, move us to be intentional about your divine rhythm--to see the truth about where we stand and what our next steps are. Teach us to be fruitful in all that we do. Amen."*