

BEARING FRUIT FOR GOD

Infertility is one of the most painful conditions a couple can find themselves in. There are couples who don't want children, and that is fine. But generally child-bearing is a desired outcome of marriage. In fact, I believe the purpose for which God instituted marriage is procreation – the creation and nurture of new human beings and the subsequent health of society at large.

In Romans 7 Paul uses the analogy of marriage to show that our being identified with Christ in His death sets us free from the law. What I find interesting is that he says – almost as an afterthought – that we now belong to another, "in order that we may bear fruit for God" (7:4). Just as child-bearing is a natural outcome of physical marriage, so fruit-bearing is to be the natural, desired outcome of our union with Christ.

We do not come to Christ for personal fulfillment, emotional well-being, or escape from judgment (although all of those certainly attend our faith). The truth is that we are united with Christ so that God may be glorified. He is glorified when we believe and trust Him, as seen in the fact that the angels rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10). He continues to be glorified as we grow in faith and produce fruit in our lives (John 15:8). What is this fruit and how do we produce it?

Some fruit is for us and some is for others. In the previous chapter Paul has explained that though we were once slaves to sin, we have become obedient to the teaching of the gospel and "the fruit we get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (6:17,22). Just as teaching our children obedience results in good fruit in their lives, so our obedience produces good fruit in our own.

Jesus said that God has chosen us and appointed us to bear fruit, "so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you" (John 15:16). The context of this promise is that we abide in Him, just as a branch abides in the vine. Perseverance in faith begets an intimacy with God that is reflected in our prayer lives. David the Psalmist wrote, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). There is a dual meaning here. It is wonderful when God gives us what we desire. It is even better when God puts His desires in our hearts, so that we can pray in accordance with His will and know that He will answer.

Probably the most important kind of fruit bearing is for both us and others. The fruit of the Spirit, the transformed character that develops as we persevere in believing, trusting, and obeying, is a blessing to ourselves and to those around us. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

When we think of procreating, bearing fruit for God, in terms of bringing other people to faith in Christ, we normally think of evangelism. I am not gifted as an evangelist. In fact, as an introvert, the thought of walking up to strangers and telling them about Jesus is pure torture. I thank God for the people to whom He has given the gift of evangelism. I love hearing their stories, like picking up a hitch-hiker and leading him to Christ before dropping him off down the road. The fact that I can't do those kinds of things, however, does not leave me off the hook. But neither am I left without a way to procreate spiritually.

Reaping the harvest is not the only part of the evangelistic process. Sowing seed is also a necessary part of it. And if I have the fruit of the Spirit growing in my life, then I have seed to sow. The new bank teller in her first day of work can receive a seed from God through my patience as she slowly learns the ropes. A sad or discouraged person can receive what he needs from God by seeing others who have joy or peace in the midst of similar circumstances. Kindness is a seed we can literally sow everywhere, all the time. Random – or not so random – acts of kindness can let someone know there is good in the universe after all. Responding in meekness ("A gentle answer turns away wrath" – Prov.15:1) instead of anger can change the heart of an antagonist. Not giving up on someone is a powerful testimony of God's presence and grace. Any good deed we do, if it is motivated by love and entered into with joy, can be a seed planted in another's life.

I can't think of anything sadder than an unfruitful Christian. Just like a married couple unable to have children, the pain would be unbearable. But no Christian must remain barren, for "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10). We are joined to Christ; we will bear fruit for God.

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