



"The best use of one's life is to spend it for something that will outlast it."

—Oswald Sanders

28-Feb-14

Without Me, You Can Do Nothing (Part Two)

[John 15:4-5](#) in the Phillips translation gives us a great deal to consider:

You can produce nothing *unless you go on growing in me*. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who *shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful*. For *apart from Me* you can *do nothing at all* (emphasis ours throughout).

This wording indicates that producing fruit is not simply a matter of having [Jesus Christ](#) or being forgiven through His sacrifice. He says we will not produce anything *unless* we "*go on growing* in [Him]."

Then the Phillips translation describes the spiritually fruitful person: It is the one who *shares* the life *of* Christ and who also shares his own life *with* Him. Most translations use words like "abide," "dwell," or "remain," but these terms can be abstract enough to make us miss their full weight and implications. By looking at this as a reciprocal *sharing* of life, we can get a clearer picture of what Christ desires from us and what will enable us to bear fruit that will glorify our Father.

First, we have to share Christ's life, which involves a great many things that human nature finds reprehensible and nonsensical. It includes being a living sacrifice and becoming examples of the burnt, grain, drink, and peace offerings. It consists of being hated by [the world](#), misunderstood by family, and persecuted by the powers-that-be. It means self-sacrifice, mortifying the flesh, and some degree of suffering. Jesus tells us that if we wish to be worthy of Him, we must deny ourselves, take up the instrument of our death, and follow Him.

In other words, just about anything we read about Jesus experiencing is fair game if we are determined to share His life. If we want a good idea of what this means, we should read [the gospel](#) accounts, putting ourselves in the shoes of the disciples and of Jesus, where appropriate. As we do this, we should examine our hearts in terms of what it would mean—what it would cost—to share in those situations. We must take care not to let the exercise devolve into a romanticized Hollywood version, but we should contemplate the reality of Jesus Christ's life—and especially those parts we may shy away from sharing because of what they would cost.

This is where the devoted are separated from the hobbyists. Here, we see the difference between those who produce fruit that glorifies the Father and those who allow the cares of this world and the desire for other things to choke out the Word of [God](#) so no fruit is produced. How much we prize and prioritize that union is the determining factor in whether we bear godly fruit. This process contains no shortcuts. If we resist sharing Christ's life, any fruit produced will be solely by our own efforts, glorifying only ourselves, not the Father.

Consider the other side of the coin: sharing *our* lives with Christ. This, too, goes against the natural grain because it also involves complete surrender. Human nature reserves things for itself that it is unwilling to share, let alone relinquish control of. For example, the driver's seat: The carnal man is convinced that he knows the best way to arrive at his destination, despite having never been there. If we are unwilling or unable to trust God with our lives, then we will fight for control of the accelerator, the brake pedal, the steering wheel, and even the radio. At the very least, we want to serve in an advisory capacity, just in case God overlooks a road sign or maybe fails to consider an easier route. It is a real struggle to share our lives fully with God.

Yet, if we are intent on being fruitful, we have this two-fold responsibility. We have to share the life of Christ, which the natural man is unwilling to do; and we have to share the totality of our lives with Him, even areas we would prefer Him not to be involved. This is union with Christ, and only through this union can godly fruit be produced. Without it, we can do nothing.

Paul gives us an example of doing this in [II Corinthians 12:7-10](#):

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of [Satan](#) to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

It is generally believed that Paul had a physical ailment that made his life difficult. Perhaps the "thorn in the flesh" was a demon that continually dogged his heels, as the language of a "messenger of Satan" that "buffet[ed]" him and about which he prayed for it to "depart" seems to indicate a sentient being more than a sickness. Regardless of the specifics, something was causing Paul problems. If we have ever had a problem that we could not shake or overcome on our own, then we can identify with the apostle.

In this snapshot, we can see Paul sharing in the life of Christ. There is a positive aspect to this, in that he was allowed to share in the revelations of God (verse 7), just as Christ did. However, on the flipside, he also shared in Christ's life by having to endure various sufferings, his thorn in the flesh being just one example. He also shared in the ridicule, persecution, opposition, and many other distresses that Jesus had experienced.

The apostle also shared this part of his life with Christ by inviting Him in and seeking a divine solution. Paul shared his problem, but in this case, His response was not to solve it for him. Instead of removing the problem, Christ

went through it with Paul. If the power of Christ was resting on Paul, as it says, it means Jesus was in the trenches *with* him—He certainly had not abandoned His apostle. So he shared his life with Christ, then submitted to whatever He did with it.

Notice Paul's response. He realized that his infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses were opportunities for Christ to be present and active in his life, and this gave him pleasure and a reason to boast. These problems were the means to a greater union because they were all areas that he could not fight or overcome on his own. However, it began with recognizing his own powerlessness—and even being thankful for it, understanding that it kept him from being led astray by self-exaltation. What we see is that Christ was protecting the union by reminding Paul of his dependence on Him.

Without Christ, Paul could do nothing. These occasions of great need turned into occasions for Him to work in Paul's life. Through Paul's surrender, God produced fruit that we are still discerning and drawing strength from almost two millennia later. This is how our Father is glorified.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Intimacy with Christ \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The narrow "pay and pray" mentality experienced by many in our previous fellowship took our attention away from the more important overcoming and growing aspect, preparing for the Kingdom of God. We desperately need to become immersed in a cause, yielding to God's creative power, personally and individually, getting us ready for God's Kingdom. We must guard our time, not allowing busy-ness and involvement with activities of the world to prevent us from forming a deep intimacy with God. Developing this

intimacy requires walking by faith, going beyond the superficial academic into an intense, in-depth practical application of actively searching for, yielding to, and obeying God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Passover, Obligation, and Love](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In the Model Prayer, Jesus mentions the forgiveness of sin in terms of paying off debt. Anyone with an unpayable debt that was redeemed by another would feel an immense sense of gratitude and obligation to his benefactor. John Ritenbaugh discusses how Christ's redemption of us from our massive debt of sin obligates us to obey and serve Him by doing good in acts of love and service to others.

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