

# The Fruitful Life

## What Will I Be Remembered For?

Fruit is not optional. Healthy things grow and produce. It is as natural for a Jesus-follower as it is in nature. Unfortunately, many believers struggle to produce fruit. They don't reach out to unbelievers as they know they should. They lack fruit.

The Fruitful Life will help you reimagine evangelism in terms of your own connection to God. Instead of just "doing" evangelism, you'll learn to make the fruitful life a part of who you are all the time.

During this 40 day journey you'll find out how the following areas transform your fruitfulness in life:

- Your connection to the vine (Jesus Christ)
- The fruit of the Spirit
- Your experiences in life
- What you value the most
- Your spiritual disciplines
- How you multiply yourself

If you're struggling with a lack of fruit in your life begin this journey today into what makes a life healthy and fruitful.

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[www.fruitful-life.com](http://www.fruitful-life.com)

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The Fruitful Life

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to the next person you lead into a life-changing relationship with Christ and his church. That person is your fruit in life—and the end goal these chapters have in mind.

May that person see you so connected to the vine that they cannot help but attach themselves to him as well. May you both grow and show fruit together as you follow Christ. And may that person be counted when it counts as your fruit.



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# Introduction: You're Invited...

## **You're Invited!**

There's nothing quite like hearing those words...

A 6-year old on a boringly muggy day gets a mailed invitation to his best friend's Birthday party at the end of June. The licensed characters on the card say, "**You're Invited**" in crayon style first-grader letters. The kid wakes up every day for weeks asking if the party is that day. Swimming pool! Presents! Cake! Ice cream! And he's invited.

A teenager wondering about her popularity at school gets a creative personalized e-mail from the super-popular homecoming queen she barely knows. "**You're Invited!**" It's an after-game party on Friday night and everyone who's anyone will be there. She starts shopping for a new outfit that very afternoon with her mother.

A college girl six months into dating the guy of her dreams gets a phone call from his mother. The mom talks about how serious the two seem to be getting, then mentions the big extended family Christmas gathering they have every year—"You're Invited!" Her mind races as she tries not to think too much about what the ring will look like on her hand.

Allison and Trevor decide to go to church for the first time. They don't know anyone. They're nervous about their three kids causing trouble in the service. They nearly leave for embarrassment when one of them makes a funny noise during the prayer. But after the service the couple sitting behind them says "Hi" and strikes up a conversation. When Allison tells them they are new, the nice couple mentions that they love having people over after church each week. "**You're invited today!**" That very hour Allison and Trevor connect with the VanStalk family over a meal. They've been a part of that church for 11 years now.

Red and Joan are empty nesters. Red only sees his neighbors when he mows his lawn. And Joan only sees them when she gets the mail. One day a new couple moves into their cul-de-sac. After getting settled the new couple, Phil & Jennifer, come over to introduce themselves. Before long Phil & Jennifer call them up saying, "**You're invited over for dinner.**" Red and Joan make their first friends in the neighborhood and go to a new small group Phil begins a few months later.

Tim's wife Julia passed away 10 years ago. They would have had their 50 year anniversary this coming December. He doesn't believe in going to church and works in the yard on Sundays instead. But several people of all ages in his duplex neighborhood have been nice to him, even though he suspects they're just trying to get him to be religious like they are. They all go to the big church on the corner Tim doesn't care much for. One day in November three of them come over and hand him a big flyer. It says "**You're Invited to Tim & Julia's 50th Anniversary Party.**" He never saw it coming and can't believe they even knew about it. In December his neighbors throw a big bash and get him to pull out his old photos of Julia and remember the best times of his life with her.

**You're Invited.** You've got to love those words!

## **YOU'RE INVITED RIGHT NOW**

First of all, **you're invited to a party.** One day two thousand years ago Jesus told a story to a gathered crowd about a party that you're already invited to (Matthew 22:1-14; Rev 19:7). The story Jesus told goes like this: There was a king whose son was getting married. He was going to throw a party with a huge banquet that no one would want to miss out on if they knew what it would be like. The king sent out "**You're Invited**" cards to many people in the land. When the wedding banquet was about to begin, he sent out his messengers to remind all the invited people to come to the party. Those he had invited either ignored the reminder because they were too busy or even grabbed the messengers to beat and kill them.

The king retaliated for these slights and crimes and decided that none of the invited guests deserved to come to the huge banquet. The king then told his remaining messengers to "go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." Jesus said that the messengers gathered all kinds of people who were willing to come to the party—good people and bad people—and the wedding hall was packed.

This is the party that you are invited to. You already have an invitation. If you have forgotten what it's all about then this is your reminder. Jesus is the King's son, and he wants you at the party. You just have to get ready and show up for the festivities. If you haven't accepted this part of the invitation, I'd like you to spend this week thinking about it, then decide whether or not you'd like to get ready for the party in heaven. At the end of this week's devotional readings, you'll find a prayer you can pray to start your party preparations.

There's more to the invitation. You can invite all your friends! Think of it as an e-mail that you can easily forward on to other people in your contact list. Or like a big stack of invita-

tions to the party that were sent to you with the postage already paid. You've just got to mail them out to people you know.

This second part of the invitation means telling others, "**You're invited too.**" Most of us instinctively know that we should increase our efforts to get more people, good and bad, to that party in heaven. The problem is we're frustrated with the results. Much we've tried hasn't seemed to work. Other ideas seemed way too difficult and strange. We see so much risk and failure in inviting others to Jesus' party—and so we start to think the professional messengers should just do it instead of us. You know who the professional messengers are: the pastors and the priests and the missionaries. But we sense that is not the way the King wants it. We sense that we're supposed to be messengers, too. We wonder if some of the people we know, good and bad, won't be at the party in heaven.

Which is the reason for the third part of this invitation. You're invited to get the most of this book by fully engaging with it. If you do you can radically change the number of people at that party because of your life. Here are some real life ways to begin to fully engage in *The Fruitful Life*:

- Participate in the *40 Days: The Fruitful Life* with the whole church. When a crowd of people get pumped up about something God is doing in all of them at the same time, something special happens. Prayer and fasting as a larger community will help to deepen the impact.
- *Meet for six straight weeks with a small group* and discuss these issues in your own way. This could be your current small group, a Bible study, a class, an accountability group or even just a group of 3-12 friends (good or bad) or 3-6 couples. Write the names of those you can do this with here:
- *Read one chapter a day.* If you don't already have a set time each day to pause to pray, read or journal, this is the time to start. Your group will be a great encouragement in this. There are 40 chapters here. If you get behind, catch up right away to experience the same concepts with others at the same time. If you finish a chapter early, don't read ahead. Just look more deeply into the Bible passages mentioned, journal or re-read that day's chapter. Check out the suggested resources listed with some chapters. Again, experience this with others at the same pace and it will deepen the impact.

Are you ready to accept the invitation? To get ready for the party? Then let's do it together. For the next 40 days let's take a look at what the Bible says about fruit in our lives.

*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers*

*But their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.*

*They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.*

**Psalm 1:1-3 (NRSV<sup>1</sup>)**



# the fruit of the vine

Fruit is not optional. Healthy things grow and produce. It is as natural for a Jesus-follower as it is in nature. Unfortunately, many believers struggle to produce fruit. They don't reach out to unbelievers as they know they should. They lack fruit.

By considering what Jesus said in John 15 you can re-imagine evangelism in terms of your own connection to God. Instead of just "doing" evangelism, you'll learn to make the fruitful life a part of who you are all the time.

## **Week One Memory Verse:**

*I am the vine; you are the branches.  
If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;  
apart from me you can do nothing.  
– John 15:5*

# Day 01

## Getting Connected to Christ



It's all about your connection to Christ.

At the end of your life, the most important thing for which you will be remembered is how connected you were to Jesus Christ. The legacy you leave behind on planet earth will be a direct result of the quality of this connection in your life. Nothing of lasting value happens outside of Christ. Notice the word, “lasting” there. That’s the operative term.

### LASTING VALUES AND LAWN MOWING VALUES

There are many valuable ways to spend your time. I mow my grass most Saturdays. It’s a valuable use of my time. The Saturdays I skip mowing the lawn reinforce this value. When it grows so tall that the neighborhood kids play hide and go seek in the thick stuff, I am reminded that mowing the lawn is an important thing to do. My value for lawn mowing increases. So I do it. It has some value in life. However, mowing my lawn doesn’t have lasting value. There’s nothing eternal about it.

Eternal values are the things that last. The ones that really matter after your time on earth is done. And these lasting values flow directly from Christ. I can’t do much of lasting value on my own. But the Bible tells me I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13). It’s my connection to Jesus that enables, empowers and energizes me to do things of lasting value. No other connection counts like this connection. I know some people who are pretty well connected. In fact, a few of them are what you would call “name-droppers.” These are the people who continually work into conversations what famous person they happened to be talking to earlier. They try to make these name-dropping times very casual, “Oh, the other day I was talking to so-and-so-famous-person and they said...” Sometimes I like to mess with these people and say to them, “You know, the other day the Pope, Bono, the President and I were having coffee, and they said...”

## WHO YOU KNOW

But having connections really does help in life. Who you know is so important in finding work and getting what you want that you are naturally envious of people with better connections, and you work hard to develop better connections yourself. I feel this way myself sometimes. I wonder, “If I only knew that person or more people in that field, then I could really accomplish something.” The problem is that all these connections count for nothing when it comes to eternity.

When the end of your life arrives, it won’t matter how well you knew your pastor, how much you know about Bible stories, or what important Christian person was your friend. When the end comes, it’s all about your connection to Christ. He’s the only name you can drop to get into heaven.

## OUR CONNECTION TO “THE LEAST”

Jesus told another story about that last moment in our lives, and it is recorded for us in Matthew 25:31-46. In this story Jesus tells us that one day he will sit on his throne in heaven and divide all the people who ever lived into two groups. Jesus calls one of these groups “goats” and the other “sheep.” Now, there’s a tough choice. Personally, I wouldn’t like to be either a sheep or a goat. But that’s what Jesus calls them. Then Jesus will tell the sheep on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

***What Jesus Cares about is that we are connected to him with the kind of intensity that shows in the way we live our lives.***

Well, this comes as quite a shock to the “sheep,” Jesus tells us. They don’t recall ever doing any of those things to Jesus. So as a group they ask Jesus, when did we do any of those things to you?

Jesus answers, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Jesus makes it clear that when these “sheep” met people’s needs—even strangers—here on earth they were in effect doing it for him! And so those on his right get to spend eternity with him. His presence in their lives produced fruit—so he gives them their reward.

Then Jesus turns to those on his right, the “goats.” Now, you have to wonder why this group doesn’t see it coming. They just watched all the sheep get the prize, and they’re in the “other group,” and Jesus is calling them “goats” and all. Jesus says to them, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”

The “goats” are in shock! They don’t recall ever having the opportunity to help Jesus out of these problems. They would remember something like that. If Jesus called me up on the phone and said, “Hey, I’m sick and in prison and I could use a good meal and something to quench my thirst. Could you stop by, and bring me a change of clothes—I don’t have any.” I would remember that! The “goats” protest and as a group ask Jesus, when did we not do those things to help you?

Jesus answers, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

## FRUIT THAT LASTS

This is a hard thing for us to hear. If we’re honest, most of us admit we don’t do these things for others much at all. Our shortcomings make us feel guilty—so we choose to ignore them. We move on to other religious activities that fill the void. We choose the Christian fruit that we can manage more easily: going to church, acting like polite Christians, not sinning in public, displaying Christian items in our homes or workplaces or vehicles. These “evidences” of being a “sheep” are more manageable to us. They help us “feel” like we have Christian fruit in our lives.

*It’s fruit  
that lasts*

But Jesus didn’t ask the goats what kind of bumper stickers they had. He asked what things of lasting value they had done. He was only concerned about eternal fruit.

These other evidences of our connection to Christ aren’t wrong—it’s just that they aren’t eternal. What Jesus wants is for us to be connected to him with the kind of intensity that lights up the way we live our lives. That’s what eternal fruit is all about. It’s fruit that lasts!

# Spiritual Formation for Ordinary People



Don't worry...you can do it!

That first chapter may have bothered you a bit... poured a little more guilt on your already burdened back. You might be wondering, "I don't need even more of this guilt in my life." You're right. But a reminder of what's important in life never hurt anyone. Jesus told that story so you'd be sure to know what counts most to him.

But how do you get there?

That's the key question. How do ordinary people get connected to Christ in such a way that lasting fruit is a constant part of their lives? This question alone is a good reason for the church to exist. For two-thousand years followers of Jesus Christ have gathered together and asked versions of this question and worked on ways to make it happen.

So, if we study the history of great Christians and Christian movements—how they lived and how they produced fruit that lasted—we actually find some answers to our question:

**HOW DO ORDINARY PEOPLE GET CONNECTED TO CHRIST AND SHOW LASTING FRUIT?**

Ordinary people become so intensely connected to Christ that in all they do they show the fruit of that connection.

But in order to get that connected to Christ...

Ordinary people first need to experience long phases of growth in their connection so that their power in life truly comes from Christ. Paul talked of this when he wrote to the Galatian

church he had started. He said, “But oh, my dear children! I feel as if I am going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives” (Galatians 4:19 NLT). Other versions say “fully formed in you.” Eugene Peterson paraphrased it as “until Christ’s life becomes visible in your lives...”<sup>2</sup> Pastor Paul looked at his people and compared these long phases of growth to the pains of childbirth! This is what spiritual formation is all about: a long—and sometimes painful—process of growth.

But in order to grow in this connection...

Ordinary people first need to leave behind anything that hinders them in their relationship with Christ. The book of Hebrews speaks to this directly when it says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish” (Hebrews 12:1-2a NLT). There are things in life that weigh us down and entangle us. These “things” are often sins we must confess and root out. Other things that hinder us in the race? Reliance on our own strength. Relying on anything but Christ for our salvation. Anything that entangles us and restricts our freedom in Christ. These things must be rooted out by believing the truth of Scripture about our own identity.

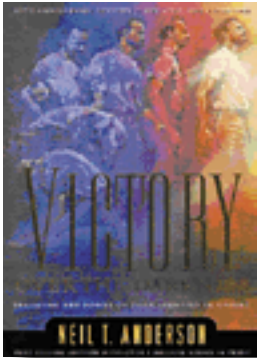
***Ordinary people  
become so intensely  
connected to Christ  
that in all they do  
they show the fruit  
of that connection.***

But in order to leave these things behind...

Ordinary people first need to cross the line and commit to Jesus Christ as their Savior. I know the very day that I “became a Christian” back in 1980. It was July 21st in College Wesleyan Church. It gives me great assurance to look back at that day and know I “crossed the line of faith.” However, times are changing and people are coming to Christ in a longer process of salvation. People have a harder time pinpointing one day or month where they “crossed the line of faith.” The church has adapted to this change and no longer calls people to “come to the altar” or “raise your hand” to say you’re accepting Christ. Often the call to commit is very private. These changes may be needed, but at the same time we still need to know, really know, that we’ve crossed the line.

## Going Deeper

**If you are seeking freedom in Christ from anything that “entangles” you and is holding back your spiritual formation in Christ I suggest that you read Neil Anderson’s book**



***Victory Over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ.***  
***Ventura, CA: Gospel Light © 2000.***

Two great ways to still have this assurance even if you don’t know the exact date when you committed your life to Christ are baptism and communion. These two oldest of Christian practices offer a great way for you to be assured that you’ve “crossed the line.” By being baptized, you’re physically showing that you’ve crossed the line and are ready to begin the process of leaving behind the things that “hinder.” Baptism is a great line to cross. And the Lord’s Supper is another great line to cross. By taking communion in church, you are saying “I am a part of Christ, and he is a part of me.” If you can say that—perhaps for the first time—then make the Lord’s Supper your line to cross.

But in order to cross that line and commit...

Ordinary people first have to come to grips with their sin. Realizing that we have all sinned is the key, confessing that opens the lock, and asking for forgiveness of that sin pushes the door wide open. Realizing that all have sinned is as simple as this verse: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 KJV). Confessing and asking for forgiveness is as simple as this one: “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). These two oft-quoted verses are where every seeker starts on the journey.

But in order to come to grips with their sin...

Ordinary people first need to be walked through all the above by someone who loves them. We often call this evangelism. We also call it discipleship. Both words sound scary and intimidating to many. But in the end they both have the same starting point and ending point, so it’s kind of hard to distinguish between the two. Jesus told us to go and make disciples and that seems to imply both ideas in one. So let’s begin to think that way again. Don’t be someone “into” evangelism.

***How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!***

Don't be "more of a discipleship person than an evangelist." Jesus didn't draw a line between the two, so we shouldn't. We should focus on walking with other ordinary people through this whole process, from beginning to end. And walking them through it takes more than five minutes. It may take five months or five years. With some, it may even take five decades. But walk with them. You may get stuck with someone at the second phase or third for years. Don't give up on them. Keep walking with them.

Romans 10:14-15 says, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching it to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" So, it's all up to you and your beautiful feet! No pressure! Just keep walking.