

Spending Time with God's People

Message 3 of 5 in the series: "Fruitfull"

A. God wants us to live abundant, fruitful lives.

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it **more abundantly**." John 10:10b (NKJV)

"This is to my Father's glory, that you **bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

John 15:8 (NIV)

Note: The fruit God wants us to bear is Godly character.

"But the Holy Spirit produces **this kind of fruit** in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23a (NLT)

B. The key to bearing a lot of fruit is remaining connected to Jesus.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. **If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit**; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 (NIV)

Note: Remain = to abide, to dwell, to endure, *to stay connected*.

"But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. **Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought**. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit." Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NLT)

C. Unfortunately, remaining connected to Jesus can be very difficult.

1. The world offers us lots of other options. "Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. **For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions**. These are not from the Father, but are from this world." 1 John 2:15-16 (NLT)
2. We are too busy. "As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But **Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing**. She came to Jesus and said, 'Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.' But the Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.'" Luke 10:38-42 (NLT)

D. Spending time with God's people is vital to staying connected to Jesus and bearing much fruit.

1. We can help each other.

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. **Three are even better**, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)

2. We can encourage each other.

"We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, **to strengthen and encourage you in your faith**, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials." 1 Thessalonians 3:2-3a (NIV)

"So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NLT)

3. We can teach and counsel each other.

"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. **Teach and counsel each other** with all the wisdom he gives." Colossians 3:16a (NLT)

"He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NLT)

4. We can hold each other accountable.

“Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; *let him rebuke me*—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it...” Psalm 141:5a (NIV)

“And let us consider how we may **spur one another on** toward love and good deeds...”

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

Reminder: Branches don’t bear fruit for themselves, but for others to enjoy.

E. Building relationships with other Christians takes time and energy, but it’s worth it.

1. Connect groups are laboratories for us to learn how to put our faith into practice.

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, **you must clothe yourselves** with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”

Colossians 3:12-13 (NLT)

Note: Relationships are messy. “Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, **settle your disagreement**. And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News.” Philippians 4:2-3a (NLT)

2. The most powerful demonstration of our new life in Christ is our love for each other.

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. **Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.**”

John 13:34-35 (NLT)

“And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.” Acts 2:44-47 (NLT)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read John 15:1-8, and then discuss the following questions:

1. Why do you think our church has the word “Fellowship” in its name and uses the motto “It’s all about relationships.”?
2. Explain the connection between remaining connected to Jesus and bearing much fruit. (John 15:5-8, Jeremiah 17:7-8)
3. Discuss the following obstacles that make it difficult for us to remain connected to Jesus:
 - The world offers us lots of other options. (1 John 2:15-16)
 - We are too busy. (Luke 10:38-42)
 - Relationships are messy. (Philippians 4:2-3)

Which of these obstacles is the most difficult for you to deal with?

4. Discuss the following reasons why relationships with other Christians are vital for remaining connected to Jesus:
 - We can help each other. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)
 - We can encourage each other. (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3 & 5:11)
 - We can teach and counsel each other. (Colossians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 1:4)
 - We can hold each other accountable. (Psalm 141:5, Hebrews 10:24)

Which of these have you experienced in our church / in this Connect Group?

5. In what ways are Connect Groups like laboratories for living out our faith? (Colossians 3:12-13)

6. Why do you think Jesus said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."?
(John 13:35, Acts 2:42-47)

Quotations to consider:

"God never intended for you to do life alone. So don't." Unknown

"I hear people say, 'I don't have to go to church to be a Christian,' and they are absolutely right. Salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. You don't have to go home to be married, either. But if you stay away long enough, your relationship will be affected." Tony Evans