

The Fruitful Grain of Wheat

The following article is an excerpt from
“A Study of the Teachings of Jesus Christ”

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

As the time of His crucifixion was drawing near, Jesus spoke to His disciples saying:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:24-26)

Jesus was at the point of fulfilling His Father’s will and purpose for His life by dying on Calvary’s cross to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37). It was at this time that He gave us one of the most profound revelations in the entire Bible.

Using a single grain of wheat as a metaphor, Jesus revealed the universal principle of spiritual fruit bearing that has been ordained by His Father. He taught His disciples that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and “dies”, it will remain only a single grain of wheat, bearing no fruit at all, but if it dies, it will bear much fruit.

Jesus first applied this analogy of the fruitful grain of wheat to His life, in order to symbolize the fruit that would be born through the suffering that He would endure according to His Father’s plan and purpose for His life, whereby many

would be brought to glory. Then He said: “If anyone serves Me, *he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also ...*” (John 12:26, emphasis added). *With these words, Jesus revealed to His disciples that the same principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in His life, would also be at work in their lives as well.*

Just as Jesus submitted Himself to His Father’s will for His life, even to the point of death on a cross, all believers will follow Him in that we also will be called upon to submit to the plan and purpose of God for our lives, “dying” to our own will and what we would choose for ourselves, in order that God’s will and purpose for our lives will be accomplished. It will be through this “death” that we will bear spiritual fruit to the glory of God, according to the principle that Jesus taught in John 12:24.

Nowhere is this death to one’s own will and complete submission to the will of God more supremely demonstrated than in the life of Jesus Christ Himself. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father that the crucifixion He was about to endure in order to obtain salvation for His people might pass from Him. He knew that all things are possible with God, and He prayed that there might be some other way to do His Father’s will without having to suffer the painful death He knew lied ahead for Him.

After praying three times for His Father to remove the cup of suffering that He was about to drink, Jesus received His answer. His Father would not remove His cup of suffering. It was His Father’s will that He suffer and die on Calvary’s cross to bring many sons to glory (Matthew 26:36-46, Hebrews 2:10).

Jesus suffered not because of any fault or wrongdoing of His own, but according to the sovereign will, plan, and purpose of God for His life. His sufferings were ordained by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), and through these sufferings He bore fruit to the glory of God.

In the same way, the suffering that bears fruit in our lives as believers is not suffering that comes about because of our own wrongdoing (1 Peter 4:12-19). Rather, it is suffering that comes about through events and circumstances that our sovereign God allows to touch our lives apart from any fault or wrongdoing of our own, according to His plan and purpose for each of us individually. Through these sufferings we will follow Jesus (John 12:26) and “suffer with Him”, or share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His glory (Romans 8:17).

As we study John 12:24-26, we should not overlook what Jesus said in verse 25: “He who loves his life loses it, and he who *hates his life in this world* will keep it to life eternal.” (Emphasis added). Such teachings are hard for all of us to understand. We might wonder why Jesus said these words, and what they could mean for us as His people.

As we consider the meaning of John 12:25, let us look again at John 12:24 where Jesus taught us that no fruit will be born apart from the “death” of the grain of wheat. That grain of wheat symbolizes our lives and all that we want for ourselves in this life. Dying to our own will and what we want for ourselves is suffering; it is to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

The things that we want may be completely honorable, with no sin in them at all. However, God may will other things for our lives, things that run contrary to what we want for ourselves but will result in fruit born to His glory, and He will work to bring these things to pass in our lives, as He has ordained them for each of us.

With John 12:24 in mind, we could understand Jesus’ words in John 12:25 as saying that the sufferings that bear fruit in the Christian life could at times make a believer even “hate” or despair of his life in this world. The Apostle Paul shared one such experience that he had in his own life, even as he was obeying God in doing the work that He had assigned for him. Paul wrote: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, *so that we despaired even of life*; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead....” (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, emphasis added).

This experience of Paul’s was for him a share in the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through this experience and others, Paul “followed” Jesus in the way and in the measure that God had ordained for his life, and through his suffering he bore the fruit that would come as God’s people take comfort and are edified by his words as they are recorded in the Scriptures. (Consider 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

As we further consider the meaning of Jesus’ words in John 12:25, we can note that the original Greek word that is translated as “hates” in this verse could also be translated as “loves less”. With this latter translation in mind, we could interpret this verse as teaching us that as followers of Christ, we will be called

upon to “love less” our own life, and our own desires, hopes, and plans for our lives, when compared to our love for and submission to the will of God, and whatever His will for our lives may involve.

As we read John 12:24-26, all believers are filled with thankfulness for the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus Christ endured on our behalf, according to His Father’s will for His life. At the same time, one of the hardest teachings in the Bible for us to accept is given to us in these verses, where Jesus revealed that all of us who serve Him must follow Him in His death, dying to what we would choose for ourselves in this life, in order that God’s will for our lives will be done, just as it was in His.

As God our Father determines for each of us, we will “follow” Jesus, and we will “be where He was” (again John 12:26), in that we also will experience our own “Gethsemanes” in some measure, however small when compared to His suffering in the Garden as He agonized over His Father’s will for His life. Our “Gethsemanes” will be the times when we are faced with suffering in our lives. In these times we also, just as Jesus did, will bring our prayers to our sovereign God, knowing that all things are possible for Him and knowing that He could spare us from these painful things. In these times, we also will be called upon to submit to the will of God for our lives, whatever His will may be, just as Jesus was called upon to submit to His Father’s will.

As God our Father determines for each of us, we will “follow” Jesus, and we will “be where He was”, in that we also will experience our own “Calvaries” in some measure, however small when compared to the suffering that He endured at Calvary. Our “Calvaries” will be the “deaths” that we experience through the losses and sufferings that our Father allows to affect our lives, according to His sovereign will and plan for each of us.

Practically speaking in terms that we can more easily understand, as we walk in obedience to God, and the circumstances, conditions, and limitations of our lives unfold, we will at times experience the “death”, or the loss, of things that we wanted to have or keep or enjoy for ourselves, as God has ordained for each of us individually. As these things happen, we will suffer because of them, and God our Father calls upon each of us to accept these things as His sovereign will for our lives, just as Jesus did when He prayed: “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”.

These “deaths” will come about in our lives in the ways and in the measure that God has determined for each of us. It will be through these “deaths” that we will follow Jesus, experiencing in some measure a share in His sufferings as we also are called upon to submit to our Father’s will and plan for our lives. It will be through these “deaths” and our obedient submission to the sovereign will of God for our lives, that we will “take up our cross” and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23-24, Luke 14:27, 33), sharing in His sufferings, drinking from His cup, and being baptized with His baptism (Mark 10:35-40). The Bible teaches us that it will be through these deaths that we will produce fruit born to the glory of God, which will bring about for us a share in Christ’s eternal glory (Romans 8:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

In summary, Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26 that all believers must, and will, follow Him in His death, which is a death to our own will and what we would choose for ourselves, and the obedient acceptance of that which God chooses for us. Just as Jesus bore fruit through the suffering and sacrifice that God ordained for His life, so also in our lives, spiritual fruit will be born through the suffering and sacrifice that God has ordained for each of us.

This is one of the most difficult teachings in the Bible for many to accept, and it is a teaching that many will very much want to deny and explain away. Maybe we could explain it away, if only this same teaching did not appear in numerous places elsewhere in the Bible.

John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-45, Luke 9:23-24, Luke 14:27, Luke 14:33, and Romans 8:17-18 all teach us about the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that will be at work in the life of every believer. These Scriptures reveal that we must, and we will, as God will bring to pass in each of our lives, endure a share in the sufferings of Christ, becoming in some measure as He was, a man of sorrows who was familiar with suffering and grief (Isaiah 53:3). This share in Christ’s sufferings is the necessary path that God has ordained for His people whereby we will bear spiritual fruit, and thereby share in the glory of His Beloved Son for eternity.

All true wisdom is to be found in the teachings of the Holy Bible, and there is no greater wisdom or depth of insight than that which is given to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus’ teaching in John 12:24-26 revealed the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in His life, and this same principle has always been, and will always be, at work in the lives of every one of God’s people until the time of Jesus’ second coming.

All through the Bible we can see this principle of spiritual fruit bearing at work in the lives of God's servants, even from the book of Genesis. Though we may not be able to see or understand how anything good at all could possibly come from the sufferings and losses that our sovereign God has allowed to touch our lives, the Scriptures reveal to us that through our sufferings we will indeed bear fruit, and we will one day realize a share in the eternal glory of His Beloved Son.

Jesus said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:29-31).

God is sovereign; He is intimately familiar with everything that happens on earth and with every detail of our lives. Nothing in His creation happens apart from His sovereign will, not even an event as small as the death of one sparrow. The things that happen to us happen as part of God's will for our lives, and the Bible teaches us that through all these things God is working for our good and for our eternal glory together with His Son.

Consistent with His teaching in John 12:24-26 and Luke 6:20-26, Jesus taught us in John 16:20 that during this present time of our lives on earth, we as His people will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. This will be our experience as we share in His sufferings, but with these sufferings we have the promise that our Heavenly Father, the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" will provide His comfort to us (2 Corinthians 1:3).

We can take comfort as believers, knowing that every wrong we have suffered, God will avenge, and every affliction, difficulty, hardship, or loss that God has allowed to touch our lives has eternal value. God is at work in our lives doing exactly what He said He would do in His Word: He is conforming each of us to the image of His Son Jesus Christ as He brings about in each of our lives a share in His sufferings (Romans 8:28-30). As we experience our share in Christ's sufferings, we can be certain based on the authority of the Scriptures that these present sufferings will bring about for us eternal glory and reward.

Through our sufferings we have also been brought into the company of the saints whose lives and experiences are recorded in the Bible. Their lives and what God chose to accomplish through their sufferings demonstrate the timeless and universal principle of spiritual fruit bearing that Jesus taught in John 12:24-26. Just as God brought forth life and good through the "death" that their sufferings

wrought in their lives, so will He also do the same through the sufferings that we endure in our lives.

God did not spare His own Son from sufferings, and we can see from Hebrews 4:15 that our faithful High Priest endured every form of temptation that we would endure. Jesus was “tempted in all things as we are”. This means that Jesus also endured the temptation to become angry and disillusioned with God His Father over suffering that He could have prevented in His life, but did not, according to His will, plan, and purpose (Mark 14:33-36, Matthew 27:46).

God loves His people with an unfailing, unconditional, and everlasting love, and He will *never* let go of any of us, regardless of our failings during some time of great trial in our lives (John 6:37-39, Romans 8:38-39, many others). Only those who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ will one day realize a share in His glory, and the necessary path to this glory for every believer, as God has ordained it to be so, is for us to experience a share in the sufferings of His Son, the Man of Sorrows, who was Himself familiar with grief. This is the lesson of John 12:24-26 and many other Scriptures as well.

Until that day comes for each of us, let us rely fully upon the promises of God’s help, comfort, deliverance, provision, and sustaining grace, as they are given to us in His word. Let us also do as the author of Hebrews exhorted us and “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16).