

Taking Care of the Orchard

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

While the Garden of Eden was still perfect, the first man, Adam, was responsible for tending the trees, taking care of the fruit, and watching for anything that could hurt or destroy the crop. Adam tended a perfect garden in a perfect environment. But after the Fall, when sin entered the world, man was forced to work for food and shelter by the sweat of his brow, in a world that was cursed.

Jesus often compared the work of the church to that of farmers and shepherds. Agriculture was a common link to average men and women of that time, but even today, the similarities are remarkable.

Anyone who has planted a garden knows the work involved in preparing the soil, planting and watering, and waiting and waiting. But to see a tremendous crop suddenly withered will cause even a strong man to be disheartened.

This booklet explains the plan and purpose

God has for men and women of all ages to respond to His cry for laborers in the field. Furthermore, it points out our need to flourish, having the right priorities. Then, as disciples of the Lord, we can tend to others that they might flourish too.

Chapter One

THE FRUIT OF TRUE REPENTANCE

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honored” (Proverbs 27:18).

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

“So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

“Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matthew 24:32-34).

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain....

“Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed” (2 Corinthians 6:1, 3).

Thanks to Calvary

Today I went back to the place where I used to go.

Today I saw that same old crowd I knew before.

When they asked me what had happened,

I tried to tell them,

"Thanks to Calvary, I don't come here anymore."

Thanks to Calvary I am not the man that I used to be.

Thanks to Calvary things are different than before.

While the tears ran down my face I tried to tell them,

"Thanks to Calvary, I don't come here anymore."

Then we went back to the house where we used to live.

My little boy ran and hid behind the door.

I said, "Son, don't be afraid, you've got a

brand-new Daddy now.

*Thanks to Calvary, we don't live here anymore."**

In a recent recording of this song, written by Bill and Gloria Gaither in 1969, the singer gave his personal testimony. He was a born-again, Blood-bought Christian, going to church with his wife and family consistently. One summer came, and they started missing church. By fall, they were arguing and would not speak to each other. When winter arrived, they only went to church once in five or six weeks, putting every-

thing else first.

After doing so well for so long, he had started drinking, and he kept on drinking. At times, the alcohol made him wild, and he did everything but hit his family. Eventually, he was arrested. As a result, during that time, he went through a great experience of repentance.

That was more than twenty years ago. After he experienced that time of repentance, sobbing and weeping, he and his family have a brand-new life together. When he got on his feet, he was able to buy a new home. Furthermore, he is an assistant pastor and a singer.

True Repentance

One of the great problems that we have as Christians is that we do not understand repentance. There is little proper repentance today among believers. Yes, repentance is a gift of grace, but like the gift of salvation, we need to act upon it. Ephraim cried out, "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned." Then, after he was turned, he repented, and was ready to receive instruction (see Jeremiah 31:18-19).

With real repentance, this is what happens: Ezra said, "O my God, my face is blush as I look into Your face. My iniquities have gone over my

head. My trespasses have reached unto heaven." This man said, "I cannot even look at You." And by the way, Ezra was a godly man (Ezra 9:6).

In Nehemiah 8:6, Nehemiah wrote, "they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

The apostle Paul said, "We need to turn and repent and bring forth fruit that follows our repentance" (see Acts 26:20).

"Repentance" means to work out what God has worked in by the Holy Spirit and the Gospel through rebound. It means change from sin, from self, to a living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Repent from Good Works

But repentance is not always from overt sin. Many people need to repent from good works, from being good without God.

In Luke 18:10-14, Jesus told the story about the Pharisee and the publican at the temple. The Pharisee basically proclaimed his own goodness compared to the apparent wretchedness of the other man. The publican, on the other hand, said that he would not come near the altar. He began beating his breast with his hands, and he said, "I can't look up to You, Lord. I am an extortioner. I am an adulterer. I can't look at You. God, be

merciful unto me, a sinner.”

Jesus said that of the two men, the publican went home justified. Do you know why? Because he repented.

Bring Forth Fruit

Bring forth fruit! In your marriage, in your friendships, in your walk with God, in your tithing—whatever you do, bring forth fruit because you have repented by the grace and gift of God.

Sadly, Romans 11:29 (“The gifts and calling of God are without repentance”) is often abused. People try to use that verse without proper understanding. It does not mean that there is no repentance. It means that God does the changing for us; *He* is the one who turns us. We do not sin on purpose only to rely on repentance later on. Grace does not give us liberty to sin; rather, it gives us a desire to be pure. We repent by the gift of God that really changes us.

A family wrote a beautiful letter recently, thanking our church for sending soul winners into their neighborhood. They said, “There are five of us in the family, and we cannot even tell you what it means to us that people from your church visited our home.”

She said, “We were fighting. We were drinking. We were screaming. Our kids were wild. And every one of us came out to visit your church, and every one of us got saved. We have been the happiest household possible during the last five months.”

That is genuine repentance.

**Thanks to Calvary (I Don't Live Here Anymore) by William J. and Gloria Gaither, copyright 1969; William J. Gaither, Inc. All rights controlled by Gaither Copyright Management. Used by permission.*

Chapter Two
**THE SUMMER IS NEAR,
THE TIME IS AT HAND**

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof” (Proverbs 27:18a).

What is the significance of the fig tree?

First of all, it represents the nation of Israel. Secondly, it applies to every born-again believer.

According to 1 Kings 4:25, every affluent Jewish family had one or more fig trees, which was a display of prosperity.

Matthew 24:32-33 says, “Learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all *these things*, know that it is near, even at the doors.” Jesus goes on to say in verse 34, “I want you to know that this generation shall not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.”

“These things” refers to the events of the end times that Jesus had just spoken of in depth to

the disciples (Matthew 24:1-31). In verse 30 and 31, He spoke of His imminent return.

The fig tree budded on May 14, 1948, under the Harry Truman administration. On that day, the nation of Israel was once again established, when forty thousand went back to the land God promised to them. There is not a true Bible scholar in the world who disagrees with that, including Billy Graham. So at the most, a hundred years would take us up to 2048. And that is not setting dates, because nobody knows when.

Many went back in airplanes, as the Word of God says in Isaiah 60:8, flying “as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows.” Isaiah did not know to call them airplanes in those days, but he was faithful to present the vision that God gave him. And fifteen hundred years later, many of us lived to see them go back by the thousands.

We lived to see the flag of David go up over Jerusalem. We lived to see the geographical location of Israel established according to Genesis 13:12-17. We lived to see the new irrigation systems replacing Jacob’s well. We lived to see all of this—while Israel still fights with the Arab nation.

And now, “Verily I say unto you, This gen-

eration shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34). That was speaking about the generation of the fig tree budding, which was in May 14, 1948. Sometimes, a generation meant from father to father. When Israel was in the wilderness, a generation was equal to forty years.

Jesus Christ is coming soon. No one knows the exact hour. But He has revealed through His Word and by the events that have been fulfilled** that the time is near, perhaps in this generation.

The Body of Christ: God's Orchard

We have an orchard, according to Song of Solomon 4:13. We have an orchard of pomegranates, each one filled with seeds, and every seed reproduces another pomegranate, which speaks of an abundance of blessings. In that orchard, we also have pleasant fruits—trees and plants, such as camphire and spikenard, used in ointments and as fragrant spices.

A godly ministry is an orchard, and it has to be cultivated continually. Few Christians know that the responsibility given to an overseeing pastor of a worldwide ministry is an enormous task. Thanks to your prayers, we have an or-

chard to tend to. Thank you to the co-laborers who, each week, bring the Gospel to our neighbors in this city. We are so thankful for the people who pray and for everyone else who shares in our outreaches. We have an orchard, and the orchard must be kept. Furthermore, every single believer is a fig tree.

The man who sang "Thanks to Calvary" had almost withered away. He almost fell into despair, having lost everything he once had. Though at one time he was an active Christian in a local church, after a time, church attendance was not a priority. The cares of this life, like dead wood, began to take precedence, choking out the life he had once experienced in Christ.

In John 15:1-2, Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Pruning (or purging) involves cutting away, but the goal is to make the believer more fruitful.

Pastors, Watch Your Orchard

We do not want God to look down years from now and see a church that is divided, that has not kept the orchard by keeping and honor-

ing the Word of God—through prayer, through love, through investment, through categorical doctrine, through soul winning, through discipleship, and through caring.

As pastors, we need to watch our orchards. We need to establish our priorities and not be taken away by distractions. Watch the orchard. Take care of the orchard. Pastor the orchard.

People, Remember Your Pastor

The Bible says in Hebrews 13:7a, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God.” Simply, remember them. Why should we remember them? Because they speak the Word of God to us.*

Next, in Hebrews 13:7b, “Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” In other words, “Follow their faith, and remember the results of the way they live.”

The Bible says that if they speak the Word of God, we are to follow their faith. If the pastor has a vision, we share the vision. If he wants people to come to church faithfully, then come. *Follow their faith.*

And as men and women follow the faith of a man of God, consider the results: fruit on the fig

tree; an orchard filled with pomegranates—the multiplied fruit of regenerated souls.

**For more about the role of a pastor-teacher in the lives of believers, we suggest the following booklets by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications: Understanding Delegated Authority (2000), and Choosing a Local Assembly (2001).*

***To see not only the accuracy of the Scriptures but also the faithfulness of God in His plan for mankind, read Fulfilled Prophecies from the Bible, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 2000.*

Chapter Three

GUARD THE FRUIT AND DON'T NEGLECT THE TREE

One thing that is so crucial for every relationship: *Guard the fig tree*. Guard the fruit. Guard the fig tree. For every family, guard the fig tree. Guard the Christian schools. Guard the Bible college. Take care that they do not slip into despair or degeneration. When fig trees get old and they are neglected, they speedily degenerate.

This cannot be over emphasized: Do not neglect your fig tree. Do not neglect the orchard. Every one of us is a member in particular in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). For every time you have gone to church, it is written down in a book in heaven. And every time you miss a church service when you didn't have to, that is also recorded (see Malachi 3:16, 17 with Hebrews 10:25 and Acts 2:41-47).

Consider the Value

Little do we know the value of a message from the Word of God. Little do we know the value of godly fruit to our God. Little do we know that we are to increase in knowledge according to His love, to prove the things that are excellent, and to bring forth fruit to His glory (Philippians 1:9, 11).

Never be familiar with the principle of the fig tree. Never be familiar with the Church. Never be familiar with the Bible. Never be familiar with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ's return is imminent. His return is near. His return is very near—even at the door. Jesus Christ is truly ready to come back. This is real. Either I am a pastor prepared and applying the message, or I am just sitting in an office and playing games.

I will not compromise with a single thing about this fig tree. This orchard has to be kept. This orchard has to be protected. This orchard has to be cultivated. This orchard needs to be fertilized. This orchard must have its rain and sunshine.

We beseech you, as workers together with God, that you do not receive the grace of God in

vain. Give no offense, that the ministry be not blamed (see 2 Corinthians 6:1,3).

Teenagers, give no offense lest the ministry be blamed. Adults, give no offense with your language lest the ministry be blamed.

The Word of God says in Hebrews 12:15, “Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God....” After we fail the grace of God, something else happens inside: A root of bitterness springs up. As a result, many are troubled because we are bitter, and it spreads and amplifies with our deception. What’s more, the Word of God says, “...and thereby many be defiled.”

Hold Fast to Your Convictions

I have a conviction about taking care of the orchard, making that my top priority. Every day of the week, I plan to be available, making sure—under God’s leadership, under God’s help—to take care of the orchard.

The orchard is the most beautiful thing God created. It is an orchard of eternal souls. It is an orchard of eternal life. It is an orchard of eternal provisions. It is an orchard where people need to be saved and discipled all over—throughout this city, this nation, this world. It is an orchard that requires dedication, commitment, and sur-

render, and it needs a daily Cross.

Let us rejoice and be glad in these times. Let us be used in the hands of God to tend His orchard. The fruit is almost ready to harvest, and the laborers are few. Let's go!

CONCLUSION

We are like trees in an orchard, and we need to have priorities—priorities such as we have never understood before. Never compromise purity with impurity. And never fall into letting people influence you into being a people-pleaser rather than going all the way with Jesus Christ.

Every pastor who is a real man of God should have a burden for every person in his congregation. When we meet Jesus in the Rapture, I want to be able to introduce each one to Jesus by name with confidence that each one has pleased Him.

Don't take the grace of God in vain; because it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lust. Grace doesn't teach us to continue in sin. Instead, we can allow the grace of God to give us the gift of changing.

Father, bless us. The best I know how, I have told all the truth and addressed every person reading this booklet, starting with me. In Jesus' precious name.

Amen.