

## LEAD! B.9 From Sloth to Fruitfulness

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### *In Which We Abide Fruitfully Instead of Vegetating Slothfully*

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." -- [Matthew 5:6](#)

Sloth may seem like an archaic sin in our busy modern world, but our frenzied activity is itself a sign of sloth, which can be defined as *a lack of vigor in pursuing God's name* -- His character and purposes. In fact, the self-centered pursuit of our own "name" -- especially under the guise of religion -- is actually the worst kind of sloth! (cf. [Matthew 23](#))

The antidote is to [empty](#) ourselves of [worldly pursuits](#) so that we become truly hungry for [faith](#), [hope](#), and [love](#). Only when we abandon slothfully seeking our own comfort -- which merely results in restlessness -- can we experience the divine dynamism and peace that comes from abiding in Him...

### **Assigned Reading**

1. [Peter Kreeft: \*Back to Virtue\*](#)
  - 11. Hungering for Righteousness vs. Satisfied with Sloth
2. Dick Hockett: *Foundations of Wisdom*
  - 3.5 (Trustworthy) Example: Proverbs about the Tongue

### **Admonition**

Read [Proverbs 6](#). What is the "fruit" of idleness?

### **Bible**

#### [John 15](#)

We have been to the upper room with John before, studying [the Holy Spirit](#) in [John 16](#) and the [folly of Judas](#) (vs. the love of Christ) in [John 13](#). This time, we grapple with how to get from beginning a relationship with the Son to manifesting the power of the Spirit:

[15:1](#)"I am the [true vine](#), and My Father is the [vinedresser](#).

There are two profound thoughts here. First of all, Christ is the vine -- the basis and source of our life. Second, God as Father is responsible for the nurture of that vine.

But since Christ Himself is already perfect, what exactly does the Father need to do?

[2](#)Every [branch](#) in Me that does not bear [fruit](#) He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He [prunes](#), that it may bear more fruit.

Apparently, the goal of the Father is to ensure that Christ bears fruit, and He does it by keeping a close watch over the branches. Fruitless branches are cut off, but even

fruitful branches are cut back; the word for "prune" is the basis of our word "catharsis" -- a painful but necessary cleansing. [C.1]

Which Jesus has already provided for us through His word:

<sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

But though we have been cleansed once, that merely intensifies our ongoing need to abide in Him, as branches of His vine:

<sup>4</sup>Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

And as branches, bearing fruit is both our purpose and a sign of our abiding [C.2]:

<sup>5</sup>"I am the vine, you [are] the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Importantly, there is no middle ground. Either we don't abide, and are trashed:

<sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw [them] into the fire, and they are burned.

Or we abide, and gain authority as sons:

<sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Obviously, this doesn't mean we can feed the desires of our flesh. Rather, to abide means to have our spirits aligned with His "name", so that we desire what He desires -- i.e., the things that glorify God [C.3]:

<sup>8</sup>By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Importantly, this abiding is not primarily about of obedience or duty -- thought it includes those things -- but of love:

<sup>9</sup>"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

God's commands are not arbitrary rules designed to show us who is boss, but an expression of His love [C.4]:

<sup>10</sup>If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

And surrendering to that love -- by keeping His commands -- is the only sure route to joy:

11"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and [that] your joy may be full.

This is particularly true of His personal commandment, which reflects the highest measure of love:

12This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

As parents and soldiers know, there is no greater joy than pouring out your life for the sake of those you love. [C.5]

How precious it is then to know that Jesus love us that very same way -- if we will but submit to His love:

14You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

To be called a friend of Jesus is a high honor, and as such it carries a great responsibility:

15No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

And what are the essential things He passed on to us from the Father?

16You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and [that] your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

I count four life-changing insights here:

1. Jesus chose us
2. He appointed us to bear fruit
3. He wants fruit that "abides"
4. God will give us anything we desire -- as long as it is Him!

Heady stuff. But it all starts with giving love:

17These things I command you, that you love one another.

Even if it means receiving hate:

18"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before [it hated] you. 19If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

[20](#)Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they [persecuted](#) Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. [21](#)But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

A sober warning about the price of abiding in His name. [C.6] But if we skip to the end of the chapter, we find a note of hope -- and the promise of a Help:

[26](#)"But when the [Helper](#) comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of [truth](#) who proceeds from the Father, He will [testify](#) of Me.

To love the world is to live a slothful life, and (at least on the surface) an easy one. To live for Jesus means emptying ourselves in love for our brothers and sisters, which will cause us to hunger and thirst for His righteousness.

But if we abide in that hunger, He will fill us with the fruits of His Spirit, which is the true testimony of Jesus -- which we can then share with others:

[27](#)And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the [beginning](#).

Comment

### ***Conversation***

1. Share about a "cathartic" experience you have had. How was your life different afterwards?
2. Discuss what it means to "abide" in Christ. Is it a passive or active state?
3. Do you believe God will do what you desire? Why or why not?
4. What do you see as the relationship between God's commands and His love? Does it always *feel* that way? If not, why not?
5. When has showing someone sacrificial love brought you great joy?
6. Have you been hated by the world? Did you deserve it?

### ***Decision***

- **Repentance:** What must you give up to abide in Christ?
- **Action:** To whom in body of Christ can you show the love of Jesus this week?
- **Worship:** Why is God's love worth the hatred of the world?

### ***Explore More***

- [Vine – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Fruit tree pruning – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
- [Catharsis – emotional spiritual or physical release in healing](#)
- [Eons: How to Bear Fruit ~ Christian Character \(from meowmom's blog\)](#)
- [O to Abide in Jesus](#)
- [YouTube – Vine & Branches](#)

### ***For Next Week***

For next week, read [James 4](#). What is the "fruit" of our lust? What is the cure?

### ***References***

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[John 15](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 14 Jan 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Jhn&c=15> >
2. **[New King James Version \(NKJV\)](#)** Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

