

## The God Life p.6: “Effective and Fruitful” 05.20.10

**Intro & Review:** 2 part conclusion to The God Life. Review - to live the God life means to live the good life. God designed us. When we live according to his design we live the best life possible. Peter nears end of his life and gives us 8 qualities to work on to live the good life (1) faith, (2) goodness, (3) knowledge, (4) self-control, (5) perseverance, (6) godliness, (7) mutual affection and (8) love. We learned early on that this is not an automatic thing for Christians - we must work at it. God does not “zap” these qualities into us. That’s why Peter writes in v.5 to “make every effort.”

Today - as we begin the wrap up to this God Life series, we want to put on our detective hats. Whenever a detective is trying to figure out a homicide, he needs to know the WHAT - what happened? - the WHY - what’s the motivation? - as well as the HOW? - how did the crime happen? Today we learn the WHAT, 2 WHYs and the HOW to be an effective and fruitful Christian.

**WHAT:** GROW these qualities in my life.

We often think that possessing these qualities would be enough to be a “good” Christian. However, we learn that we never actually arrive and that no matter how long we’ve been a Christ-follower, our aim is to increase these qualities in our lives.

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure ...”  
2 Peter 1:8 NIV

This is a life-long project. Possession is only the beginning. Someone who is living with God living within them will continuously be growing. We learn two reasons WHY this growth is so important!

**WHY #1:** So I never FORGET Christ’s change in me.

There are few things worse than a sinner saved by grace forgetting that he or she is first off a “sinner” and second that he or she has been changed by grace.

“Without these qualities you can’t see what’s right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books.”  
2 Peter 1:9 MSG

The world desperately wants to see the authenticity of working Christianity. Genuine salvation is the one life-changing, eternity-determining transformation that makes a real difference. Sadly many times people name themselves Christian, but go on living the death-decaying-corrupting-sinful way of the pre-Christian life... except now they add self-righteousness and judgment to the mix.

Peter is telling us that when we continuously work to add these 8 qualities in increasing measure to our lives, it’s really hard to forget where we came from. It’s easy to forget if we think somehow none of this applies to us. We become so near-sighted that we’re blind to our former corrupted selves. We lose the attitude of grace to others.

**WHY #2 - So that I become more EFFECTIVE and PRODUCTIVE as a Christ-follower.**

We have become so inclined to remember that God loves and accepts me as I am that we forget that He doesn't want to leave us that way. A mother loves her dirty child in the mud puddle, but she will still give the child a bath. Would our loving Father God do any less?

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive ...”  
2 Peter 1:8 NIV

“keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful ...” 2 Peter 1:8b ESV

“The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be...”  
2 Peter 1:8a NLT

We often struggle knowing what “being fruitful” means. Sometimes we think of it as becoming more like Christ. Sometimes we think of evangelizing and sharing our faith - “winning more fruit” for Christ. Certainly both are good. However, I think the NLT’s “useful” comes closest to the mark. God wants to use Christ-followers to accomplish His will on Earth. The more of these qualities you possess in increasing measure, the more useful you can be to Him!

Is “being fruitful” or “being usable” something that is important to God? You bet! Consider how much of Jesus’ talks / parables deal with it:

- “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” Matthew 3:8 ESV
- “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Matthew 3:10 ESV
- “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.” Matthew 21:43 ESV
- “But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” Mark 4:20 ESV
- “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. John 15:2 ESV
- “If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down.” Luke 13:9 NLT

This teaching of Jesus is so pervasive that every Gospel contains it. In the parable we heard read in tonight’s Scripture reading we learn of the land owner who comes to his fig tree only to be frustrated that there are no figs. “Why should it take up the soil?” he asks. “Cut it down!” This is not a matter of impatience on the owner’s part. Three years - we’re told - he has been waiting! This should send a chill down our spines. How long has God been waiting for fruit in your life? Is the fruit we’re producing something good or are we more like rotten banana Christians?

We learn a most important principle here. ***God did not save us merely so we could go to Heaven.*** We often look at it in that way, don’t we? Jesus tells us there’s more to the story. God is the owner. And He expects fruit in our lives. He expects us to live like His Son. He expects that we will bring His will to Planet Earth. **That brings us to the “HOW”:**

## **HOW: I grow and become more useful to God the more I** **EXPERIENCE Christ.**

There is no life-altering, world-changing usefulness to God without God's power as part of the equation. We receive that power the more we KNOW Christ. Look at what Peter writes in the end of v. 8:

“... in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”  
2 Peter 1:8c ESV

We often misunderstand this word “knowledge” in the Bible. When we read about “knowing” we think of a thinking, intellectual, memorizing, school-like storing away facts. We can know about someone without really knowing them. When the Bible talks about knowing it means more. In fact, the first time we see this idea of “knowing” is in the beginning of the Bible when Adam “knew” his wife. Knowing Christ, the way Peter has in mind, is an almost intimate experience...

“... as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus.” 2 Peter 1:8c MSG

This is how we become more useful. We experience Christ. As we experience Christ, He changes us and He empowers us. We both have a change in desire to serve Him AND are empowered by His Spirit to be able to do it. In many ways Jesus' Spirit to us is like the gardener in Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree. He gives us His attention:

“The gardener answered, ‘Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer.’” Luke 13:8 NLT

**Conclusion: Jars of Clay or Cracked Pots?** I don't know about you, but today's teaching fills me both with dread and excitement. I am excited for the possibility that God would want to use me. But I'm overwhelmed because I know my weaknesses and how very much I fall short. I'm reminded of Paul's writing in 2 Corinthians 4:7:

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” 2 Corinthians 4:7 ESV

We are not described as shiny gold or polished brass. Rather we are described as earthen vessels - jars of clay. Not something fancy that is put up on the mantle piece. We are described as jars of clay - to be used by God for whatever purposes He might have for us.

Whenever I hear “jars of clay” - at least as it applies to me - I am more likely to think of a *cracked pot* rather than a *clay jar*. I'm broken and pieced back together. How about you? When you think of your own usefulness to Christ are you worried about the cracks in your life? Are you worried that as a cracked pot that you just might leak if God tried to use you? **Good news: God doesn't expect perfection.**

Recall the rest of Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree. The gardner waters and pours on the fertilizer. If you allow Him, the Holy Spirit WILL give you all the special attention you need so that you can become usable. **God does expect your surrender to His use.**

And those cracks? Don't worry about them. That's where the rest of 2 Corinthians 4:7 comes in. You see, when people see your cracks, what they'll really see is “the surpassing power of God” shining through! The cracks are not *mirrors* of your weakness, but *windows* of God's strength!