How Can I Live a Fruitful Life?

Plan Description

What does it mean to live a truly fruitful life? Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne Ric Thorpe explores Jesus' words in John 15 and his invitation to "remain in me." Over five days, discover how staying close to Jesus, trusting the loving Gardener through pruning, and allowing God to shape your desires can lead to a life of deeper faith, love, purpose, and prolific fruitfulness.

DAY 1 — What Does a Fruitful Life Look Like?

Scripture: John 15:1–8; Psalm 80:8–19

How can I live a fruitful life? How can I be useful? How can I be a blessing?

These are questions I find myself returning to. We want our lives to count for something, to make a difference in the lives of others, and to know that the years and opportunities God has given us have not simply passed us by.

But how does that happen?

In John 15, Jesus is with his disciples shortly before his trial and crucifixion. He has been showing them what life looks like when people encounter the love of God, and now, at the centre of this final conversation with them, he gives them a wonderfully simple picture.

Jesus says that he is the true vine, his Father is the gardener, and we are the branches.

The words "true vine" carry Israel's story behind them. In Psalm 80, Israel is pictured as the vine God brought out of Egypt and planted. In Isaiah 5, God lovingly prepares his vineyard, but it does not produce the fruit he seeks. Now Jesus says that he is the true vine. Life, faithfulness, and fruitfulness find their source in him.

And the Father is the gardener. He plants, tends, watches, and prunes.

So the future of our lives does not finally rest on our achievements, plans, abilities, or determination. It rests in the hands of the Gardener.

How, then, can we live fruitful lives?

Jesus' answer is surprisingly simple:

Remain in me.

And tomorrow we will explore what that invitation actually means.

Reflection Question

When you think about living a fruitful life, what does fruitfulness mean to you? What would it look like for your life to be useful and a blessing to others?

Call to Action

Take some time today to ask God where he wants to bring greater fruitfulness in your life. Resist the temptation to make a plan immediately. Begin by listening.

Prayer

Father, I want the life you have given me to bear good fruit. Help me understand what true fruitfulness looks like and teach me to receive my life from Jesus. Amen.

DAY 2 — Remain in Jesus

Scripture: John 15:1–11

What might it take for you to remain more deeply in Christ?

Jesus repeats the word “remain,” sometimes translated “abide,” again and again in John 15.

To remain or abide calls to mind living at home, where people share life in long-term relationship with one another. Jesus is inviting us into a permanent, living bond of trust with him, where we choose long-term faithfulness and commitment to God and to others.

It is rich, deep, secure, life-giving, and purposeful.

Think again about the branch connected to the vine. Jesus is the source of all spiritual life. His words nourish us. His love becomes our home. His presence changes us from within.

And Jesus always makes the first move.

There may be some reading this who feel on the edge of faith, perhaps looking in nervously or even longingly. You might imagine Christianity is about becoming good enough for God or producing a more impressive life.

Jesus’ picture is the opposite.

A branch cannot give itself life. Becoming a follower of Jesus does not begin with what we achieve for God, but with what God has done for us in Jesus. He bore our sin and

judgement, died for us and rose again, offering forgiveness, new life and friendship with God.

His invitation is not: make yourself fruitful and then come to me.

It is: come to me. Trust me. Remain in me.

So what one deliberate step could you take this week to stay close to him?

Because remaining in Jesus leads us somewhere we might not expect.

The Gardener also prunes the branches that are already bearing fruit.

Reflection Question

What currently helps you remain close to Jesus, and what has been making that relationship more difficult?

Call to Action

Choose one deliberate step you can take this week to remain more deeply in Christ. Make time for Scripture, prayer, worship, or simply being quietly present with him.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you that you make the first move towards me. Help me remain in your love, allow your words to nourish me, and receive the life that only you can give. Amen.

DAY 3 — Be Willing to Be Cut and Pruned

Scripture: John 15:1–6; Hebrews 12:10–11; Romans 5:3–5

Is this a season of pruning for you?

Jesus describes his Father as the gardener or vine grower, and in John 15 he tells us that the gardener cuts away branches that bear no fruit and prunes branches that are already fruitful.

That second part can be surprising. The warning is real: detached from Christ, the source of life, we wither. But the surprise is that the Gardener also prunes branches that are already alive and fruitful. His purpose is deeper fruitfulness.

The Father is tending living, fruitful branches, and his purpose is deeper fruitfulness.

Pruning can be painful. Plans unravel. Doors close. Hopes are disappointed. Health weakens. Something familiar comes to an end. We often experience these things simply as loss, as though something has been cut away.

We should not label every experience of suffering as a direct act of God. But no suffering lies outside the Father's loving care, and he can use even things we would never have chosen to deepen humility, dependence, patience, wisdom, compassion, and faith.

When I was eighteen, I stayed an extra term at school to sit the Cambridge University entrance examinations. I failed. My dreams were shattered, and I felt embarrassed and disappointed.

Later that year I went to Birmingham University, which initially felt like a lesser choice. Yet within weeks, I became a Christian. My life turned around. There was the joy of salvation, a deep sense of being found by God, and a new purpose. Looking back, I can see God cutting away pride and a wrong centre of gravity. What felt like loss became a place where new life began. Now I am deeply grateful for his pruning in my life.

Perhaps resentment, hurry, self-protection, a mastering habit, or something whose time has ended needs cutting back in your life.

Pruning is painful.

But the hands holding the knife are the hands of the loving Gardener.

And his desire is not simply fruit.

Tomorrow we will see that Jesus speaks of much fruit.

Reflection Question

What feels as though it is being cut back in your life at the moment? What might God be forming in you through it?

Call to Action

Bring one disappointment, loss, or area of pruning honestly before God today. Ask him for the grace to trust his loving care even when you cannot yet see what might grow from it.

Prayer

Father, when I experience loss or disappointment, help me trust that my life remains in your loving hands. Use even difficult experiences to deepen my faith. Amen.

DAY 4 — Aim for Prolific Fruitfulness

Scripture: John 15:7–17; Galatians 5:22–23

What would prolific fruitfulness look like in your life?

Jesus says that the Father is glorified when we bear much fruit.

I love that picture.

This is a picture of prolific fruitfulness: tractor carts overflowing with grapes, a superabundance.

John repeatedly draws our attention to this abundance. Jesus offers life in all its fullness. He speaks of rivers of living water. He feeds thousands and there are baskets left over. At his first miracle, there is an extraordinary abundance of wine.

God is not reluctant about fruitfulness.

But what does this fruit actually look like?

It is not simply institutional success, reputation, busyness, or impressive numbers.

In John 15, fruitfulness includes the deep blessing of prayer that changes lives and circumstances. It is the fruit of obedience as God's purposes are worked out through lives offered to him. It is loving others and being prepared to lay down our lives for them. It is the joy of salvation and sharing the good news about Jesus in our words and actions, so that others might encounter the love of God. It is persevering through difficult experiences in ways that encourage others to persevere too.

Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So ask the question again.

What would prolific fruitfulness look like in your life?

Not somebody else's life. Not the life you think you ought to have.

Yours.

And tomorrow we come to the final part of Jesus' invitation.

Because renewal does not begin somewhere else.

It starts with me.

Reflection Question

Where are you already seeing the fruit of Jesus in your life? Where would you love to see him produce more?

Call to Action

Choose one area of fruitfulness to pray about specifically today. Ask God not merely for personal growth, but for that fruit to become a blessing to somebody else.

Prayer

Father, I want my life to bear much fruit for your glory. Grow in me the character of Jesus, deepen my love for others, and use my life to bring your goodness to the people around me. Amen.

DAY 5 — It Starts with Me

Scripture: John 15:7–17; Galatians 5:22–25

What if the renewal you are praying for begins with you?

It can be easy to hope that renewal will begin somewhere else—in another church, through another leader or in a future generation.

But Jesus brings the invitation much closer.

Remain in me.

Renewal begins as I choose to remain in Jesus and receive the life of Christ today.

Jesus invites us to be intentional about this. He invites us to remain, to abide, and to lean into a deeper relationship with God in Christ. He encourages us to allow his words to settle in us, transform us, and challenge us as we read Scripture and take his words to heart.

He invites us to allow our desires to be shaped by God's love, God's purposes, and God's agenda.

As his words settle deeply within us and his love shapes our desires, he invites us to ask boldly for his purposes to be fulfilled in our lives, our churches and our communities.

Over these five days, we have asked how we can live fruitful lives. We have discovered that fruitfulness begins not with what we achieve for Jesus, but by remaining in him. We have considered the painful work of pruning and the loving hands of the Gardener. And we have seen Jesus' vision of abundant, prolific fruitfulness.

Your calling will have its own particular shape.

But the source is the same:

The life of Jesus flowing through a life offered to him.

So perhaps the best place to finish is also the best place to begin.

What one faithful step can you take today?

Remain in Jesus.

And let it start with you.

Reflection Question

What one deliberate step would help you remain more deeply in Jesus and allow his life to become more visible through yours?

Call to Action

Pray for your church and for one person you long to see encounter the love of God. Ask Jesus what faithful step you could take to help that person know him. Write it down and begin today. You might ask a friend to pray with you as you take that step.

Prayer

Jesus, I choose to remain in you. Let your words settle deeply in me, shape my desires, and teach me to pray for your purposes. May my life bear much fruit for your glory and for the good of the world you love. Amen.