

FTBC

GROWTH TRACKS


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Welcome to Growth Tracks which is FBC's program designed to set the disciple on the firm foundation spiritual maturity.


*In 2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV) Paul writes "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".*

The key to growth in our spiritual lives is encountering the glory of God through the person of His Son who is His perfect image. The more our hearts are filled with the knowledge of Him the more our characters are moulded, the more our hearts are filled with His love and more our lives will be directed towards the purpose for which we were created....to glorify Him. Each chapter is designed to provide a progressive track to show the face of Christ through selected but key passages in the Bible laying down the bed rock foundations of faith that will form the basis for a life -long learning and growing in to the likeness of Christ. Prayerfully follow these chapters and His Spirit will propel you into a trajectory of robust growth and spiritual transformation. Learn how to read the bible by tackling whole passages of Scripture rather than piece meal verses. See how principles from the passages will be translated to everyday life. For those disciples going into the Gamma program these presentations will help bridge the gap between the Alpha Beta programs and the more in- depth Gamma discipleship program.

For those who prefer to listen and see the contents of this book you can go to our website at [www.fbc.com .my](http://www.fbc.com.my) and each chapter will be presented in a series of slides at the resources section of our site under the title "Growth Tracks"



MODULE 12



**SPIRITUAL FULLNESS**

John 15:1-17

Topic today is growing in Christ. The passage is taken from John 15:1-17. This very famous chapter in the Book of John comes from the final discussion that Jesus has with His disciples before the cross. He uses the metaphor of the wine producing fruit. Let's take the first half of the passage.

*John 15:1-6 (ESV) 1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 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. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

Let's look at the details of the passage. Jesus says, I am the true vine which means there are other vines which are counterfeit, they are not going to produce any fruit. Jesus is the ultimate true vine.

My father is the vinedresser. This is God described in this metaphor as the owner of the vineyard who also looks after and cultivates the vine. Every branch that does not bear fruit refers to us.

So the first kind of branch that we are seeing here in this passage, Jesus describes

*John 15:1-3 (ESV) 1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.*

So if there is no fruit produced by these particular branches he takes away. The second kind of a branch is a branch that produces fruit.

*and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes,*

So these are the branches that actually have fruit and as soon as he sees there is fruit, God prunes it. So the message in the metaphor is that there are two types of branches.

- Fruitful branch
- Fruitless branch

The fate of the branches may be determined by the presence of fruit.

*2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.  
6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

From this passage, we know that fruitless branches will be taken away and they will be burnt. On the other hand, look at verse 2

*every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

So here we have it fruitless branches are taken away and burnt, fruitful branches are pruned in order for them to produce even more fruit.

Now here comes the spiritual lesson. There are two types of people in church, just like there are two types of branches in the vine. There are people who are represented by the fruitless branches. These are the people who have a formal relationship with Jesus. They call themselves Christians but there is no spiritual transformation in their lives, which means there is no fruit. Then there are those who have fruitful branches. Christians who have a formal relationship with Jesus but also more importantly have vital relationship, which means there is spiritual transformation in their lives and they began to look like Jesus.

Now let's look at the first kind of person attending church, the one represented by the fruitless branch.

- He has a formal relationship with Jesus, which means may have actually said the sinner's prayer, maybe a church goes, formally baptized, may even have participated in church programs or signed up for membership.
- For all intents and purposes, it could be anyone attending church. However, there is no vital relationship with Jesus.
- They are not plugged into Jesus.
- They are not drawing from Jesus their spiritual life, which means there is no change in character, they are unaware of any sin or much sin in their lives.
- There is no continuing repentance. Their main focus is to live, to please themselves.
- They are obviously bored with the bible, because they are not plugged in or wanting to walk in love, relationship with Jesus and they only trust themselves. This is a fruitless branch and they will be cast away.

The second kind of person is represented by the fruitful branch.

- His is a person who also like the first one has a formal relationship with Jesus, may have said the sinner's prayer, goes to church, baptized, as well as participated in church programs, but the difference between him and the first branch is that there is a vital relationship with Jesus. It is not just formal from the outside. There is an inside relationship with Jesus which causes a change in character.
- His main focus is to live to please God, to glorify Jesus.
- There is an intense awareness of sin and the need for repentance.
- He is excited about studying the Bible and he actually trusts Jesus with his life.

The fate of these two kinds of people are completely different. At the end of time, the one with only formal relationship with Jesus Christ will be eternally separated from God and the one who is fruitful with the vital relationship will be pruned, which means there will be trials and testing in their life to increase more fruit.

Following the metaphor of the vine, pruning is very important. When we prune fruitful branches, it drives the nutrients to the production of fruit rather than to growing more branches. So what God does is that he prunes fruitful branches, which means he takes away the bits of our character that are standing in the way of production of fruit. These areas are

- Areas of selfishness
- Stubbornness
- Impulsiveness
- Anger-Temper
- Pride
- Insensitivity

These are the areas that need to be removed, so that we display more and more of a Christ like godly character. This entire process is actually involuntary. So we are totally within God's control, we can't ask for pruning or deny pruning, God sends it along our way.

Well you might think it is rather unfair. If we are faithful to God and we produce fruit and in return God sends trouble along our way. **Doesn't God love us?** The fact is pruning is a sign of love. Let's take a passage in the Book of Hebrews

*Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV) My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."*

Passage tells us here that the Lord only reproves or disciplines his children, his sons. He doesn't discipline other folk. He disciplines because he loves. The purpose of discipline and pruning is to produce more fruit and God is interested in it.

Paul writes,

*Romans 8:28 (ESV) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Let's look at the central thesis of this verse. It means bad things, whether it is our fault which means our sin and our greed, our pride or somebody else's sin and greed and pride causes pain upon our lives, as well as, good things. All these things combine, God will use good, God will use bad and use them to transform us to be more and more like Jesus.

So here is an example of a pruning process. Suppose one faces financial difficulties and when you face financial difficulties or trials, it could be due to our fault or not, it doesn't really matter. God uses it to remove stubbornness, unfaithfulness, greed and idolatry in our lives even if it is due to our fault. If we are innocent, God promotes unquestioning faith in his care and power to sustain. The net result is that the spiritual transformation so that we become more Christ like.

The passage tells us that God is deadly serious about fruit. Fruit will determine our eternal destiny. So next question is how do we produce this fruit?

Now how do we actually bear fruit. The answer actually lies on the fourth verse

*4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*

Here the metaphor is that the branch has to draw its sustenance, its nutrients, its growth, its power from the main stem, which is the vine. If it is not stuck onto the main stem, the vine, it can never grow or survive. In the same way, we need to be stuck on to Jesus, drawing from him spiritual power for transformation. Only Jesus can provide true spiritual transformation. We need to abide in Jesus, not in anybody else, because the answer is in verse 1, "I am the true vine". He is the only person and God is totally pleased with him, who has lived a righteous life, the life that we should have lived.

*John 15:7-12 (ESV) 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

### **So what does it mean in verse 7 to abide in Jesus?**

Let's examine this verse further to find out what Jesus means by abide. The word 'abide' literally means remain or maintain or stay in and it is a voluntary condition, because of the word 'if'. 'If' means that we can decide. If we want to grow and be spiritually transformed then we need to remain in him, which means we are asked to make a daily decision to remain in relationship with Jesus as a person. To make Him the main purpose of our lives. To draw life from Him, guidance, inspiration, values and to grow in a relationship.

### **How do you do that?**

It is in the second part of the verse, and my words abide in you, which means in practical terms when we remain in Him voluntarily, His words will permeate our lives and influence us because we allow it to do so. It is a voluntary condition.

### **What does it mean to abide in Jesus?**

*7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,*

Which means we are being totally influenced by Jesus's words, the next thing that will happen is that

*ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

Here when we ask, we pray. When we are influenced by God's words and we pray then by this verse 8

*8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

So therefore having the word of God influences and our own desires expressed in prayer, results in the Father being glorified and that we bear much fruit. In this process where we have spiritual transformation and also lastly prove to be disciples, which means to prove our authenticity.

Let's look at this verse again because it is so important. The first condition is my words abide in you, which means reading and having the Bible influence our lives. The second condition is to ask whatever we wish, pray to the Lord for fruitfulness. If we pray and read the Bible and have it influence our lives then the results will be,

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

We are able to glorify God, bear fruit or spiritual transformation and then verify our own authenticity.

**Why should I read my Bible, why should I pray? It is so difficult.**

Very simple. The motive for spiritual transformation is actually love.

*9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*

The ultimate motive is love. The intense perfect kind of love that can only be found between God the father and Jesus, the same kind of love has been expressed to us through Jesus with his disciples and to us on the cross.

### **What happens when we love him?**

*10 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.*

We love God by obeying him.

*12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

### **How do we love God by obeying him?**

We do this by loving each other. This is not the only commandment but it is the main commandment that forms a foundation of all of God's commandments. We love God by loving each other.

So let's look at the process. Just as the Father has loved Jesus, and Jesus loves the Father by obeying him, the same pattern is patterned with us. Jesus loves us and we obey Him and the most important command in obeying Him is that we love each other.

So love for each other is evidence of obedience, which is evidence of love of Jesus. Here is a paradigm, the father loves the son, the son loves the father by obeying the father. Same way Jesus loves us and we love him back, we reciprocate that by obeying him and the commandment which he wants us to obey is to love each other. We can't see God, people can't see that we love God but loving each other becomes the only tangible, visible evidence of our reciprocal love for God. People will not be able to see that we love God unless we love each other. Loving each other becomes the only concrete evidence of proof for our love for Jesus.

There are three concepts that we need to understand.

- God's love
- What obedience is
- How it relates to our love for one another

*John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*

So the paradigm is, the Father loves the Son and the word is as the Father has loved me. The word as means the manner, intensity and character of the love of the Father for his Son. It is the same kind of love where Jesus takes the initiative, He loves us, we didn't choose to love Him first, He loved us unconditionally and totally and with the same kind of intensity God the father loved the Son.

So we need to compare what human love is like compared to God like love. We are spiritually dead, incapable of God like love. God like love is unconditional and radically vulnerable. Human love because we are needy is



conditional and non-vulnerable, because we need to protect ourselves.

So our love is conditional and non-vulnerable. So when Jesus dies on the cross and loves us with the same kind of intensity which is unconditional love, so it transforms us, so that our love either transformed by Jesus is also unconditional and radically vulnerable.

The next issue is obedience. How do we relate to God? We relate to God by obedience. Why? Because when you are encountering a being who is perfect in knowledge and power and has a purpose for us, the only way in which any logical person has to relate to God is to obey him, because he knows everything. He is all powerful and he has a purpose, which is the most important thing in the world for us. So obedience is natural, is expected.

### **How do you relate to fellow human being?**

We reciprocate God's love through his son to our fellow human beings by love. Let's look at how obedience is related to loving one another. In the Ten Commandments, the first four commandments are about loving God.

- You shall have no other gods before Me.
- You shall make no idols.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Keep the Sabbath day holy.

The rest of the commandments

- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet.

All those are commandments in which the underlying issue is to love one another. So loving God, loving one another. So loving one another is a reflection of our love for God. That's how obedience to our God is related to loving one another. John later on writes in his first epistle

*1 John 4:19-21 (ESV) We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

So this actually in the epistle of John summarizes Jesus thinking in John 15. So it is necessary for us to differentiate between fake love, which is human love and real love. There are two kinds of love. In fake love the aim is to use the other person to fulfill our own happiness so our affection, is necessary is conditional and non-vulnerable. You can cut back if you do not get an adequate response from the other person. You see in marriages and courting couples they are always looking to the other person for validation. What do you think when a husband forgets the wife's birthday.....it will be a disaster as he has failed to give her what she needs and she will be tempted to retaliate as well.

Authentic love is completely different because the aim is to spend yourself for the other person's happiness without

expecting anything back in return. It is unconditional and radically vulnerable. No one can really give it because we all need love. We invest our love only if we can get a return, so we love a person for the love we are getting back in return. We are all mercenary in that sense. So we need someone to love us for our sake who does not need our love, to love us so radically and unconditionally that it will free us to love others unconditionally and radically. Only Jesus can do that and he proved it on the cross and once we are so filled with His love that we no longer have to look to our partners or wives or friends for our complete validation. Only then we are free to give genuine love without expecting anything in return.

Let's look on, what happens to us when we obey.

*11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Which means we are going to experience a spiritual joy, a special joy. A joy that is not determined by circumstances, it is the joy of Jesus and it will be a full joy when we obey.

Famous Christian philosopher Dallas Willard once wrote, "Failure to attain a deeply satisfying life always has the effect of making sinful actions seem good. Herein lies the strength of temptation."

What he is saying is that, unless you obey and experience that wonderful deep satisfying joy which God gives us, then we will be tempted in making actions which are sinful. Sinful actions seem good and wonderful and exciting because we haven't really tasted the joy that Jesus gives us and he only gives that joy to us when we love each other.

*John 15:13-17 (ESV) Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

So the motive of spiritual transformation is that we are God's friends, he has made us friends. We can't choose him as friends because he is God and we are his creatures but he can choose us, he has made us his friends. He has chosen us for spiritual transformation.

### **How are we his friends?**

There are two criterias which John gives.

- 1. Sacrificial love:** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. Jesus chooses us as his friends and demonstrates it by sacrificial love for us on the cross.
- 2. Friends:** I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. A master doesn't share his thoughts, his plans, his aspirations with his servants but a friend does. Sharing with us about his plans and himself illustrates to us that we are his friends.

So let's look at the summary of this passage. How do we actually produce fruit?

It starts of not with us but with God. God made us his friends by choosing us, revealing himself to us and dying for us on the cross. He loved us first. This causes spiritual transformation, we are born again. Once we are born

again, we are guided by Spirit to do two things. We decide to abide in Jesus, which means we make a decision to let His word permeate our lives and we pray in order to grow and we do this because we love him in response to his love to us and when we reciprocate in this way, it results in us living a life focused on loving and serving others. This brings joy into our lives, because of the fruit that we have produced by loving God, by loving others.

### **How do I apply what I have learnt?**

First of all, we do not have to strive to please God or produce the credentials in order to be saved. Whenever we are confronted with the situation where there is temptation by sin or a difficulty in life, we have three ways in which we deal with it.

1. We can be passive, just sit back and wait and pray and ask God to just take away the sin or that terrible habit.
2. We could make a decision to obey the law on ourselves and active decision.
3. We can engage in truth by preferably reflecting on the word and letting it engage with our will, power comes when you actually see the truth.

The first instinct for most of us is to make a decision to obey the law on ourselves. That's not abiding in God and Jesus. Mohammad Ali was a world champion boxer. This is what he writes,

**“With everything I do,” he says, “I ask myself, Will God accept this? One day you’ll wake up and it’ll be Judgment Day, so you need to do good deeds. I love going to hospitals. I love sick people. I don’t worry about disease.”**

Ali's actions are based entirely on his faith which is based on the Quran which says

Surah 28:67 “But any that (in this life) had repented, believed, and worked righteousness, will have hopes to be among those who achieve salvation.”

So he is using works, he is actively trying to obey the law in order to have some hope. He is not even guaranteed of achieving salvation. But he will fail because John 15:1 says

*John 15: 1 “I am the true vine.....*

There is no one else who can please God. Only Jesus can please God, so therefore the only way we are going to please God is

*4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me*

There is only one person whom we've got to be in relationship with in order to fulfill God's requirements for righteousness in life. Jesus lived a righteous life, only abiding in him and he lives the righteous life that we should have lived, we can't live it on our own as Ali has found out.

The other way of dealing with temptation or difficulty is the passive way, sit back and wait and pray and ask God to take away the sin. This passive manner will also result in failure. Sitting back, doing nothing and waiting for God to act is not an option, because in verse 7 Jesus says, if you abide in me and my words abide in you. There is a

condition, it is a voluntary condition that if determines this. If we want to grow, if we want to bear fruit, we have to make a decision and actively have God's word permeate and influence our lives. So we can't just sit back and wait. So abiding in Jesus is engaging with the truth. Prayerfully reflecting on the word, letting it engage your will power. Power comes when you actually see the truth.

So how do you determine the purpose of our lives. We can remain in the world or remain in Christ. If we remain in the world our values will be different. We are letting the world dictate our values,

- Money bring power and prestige. We will hunt for that money.
- Status build up self esteem
- Looks are everything

If we remain in Christ, then we need to prayerfully look at God's word and consider that and have that permeate our lives and change our values.

- Where people are more important over things.
- Serving over self
- Sharing the word –eternal value

We can actually see that value in our lives. That's how we abide in Christ and that's how we determine our purpose of life and that's how we will produce the fruit that God is looking for in our lives.

## Questions

1. There are two kinds of "Christians " who are in church represented by the two kinds of branches of the vine. What is John trying to teach us here?
2. What will happen to us if we are fruitful Christians? what will happen if we are not?
3. Why is pruning necessary to produce even more fruit?
4. What is our responsibility in the production of spiritual fruit in our lives?
5. How does God's love enable us to truly love each other?