

Trees and Fruit

BIG IDEA:

A direct connection exists between who I am, the real me, and what I do. The actions exhibited in my life reflect the internal state of my soul.

*Whence are these deeds of goodness?
Come they from mediation on their doing
Autonomously?
Or do they flare as oily rags
Of unknown combination,
Spontaneously?
Nay, they are born as you and I,
Miraculously,
Their fair mother called Desire
Springs them forth from dwelling close
With vision, their unstable sire.
These two, Want and anxious Willingness-to-See
Bear children
It is not sure
On what mer's hopes do hive.
They sleep to see in dreams alive? (Isaiah 29:8)
All deeds must come from want that's pure.
Then soul of mine, flame purely
And thou shalt see Desire conceive in thought, surely,
Some hoped-for form.
And from the image shall come forth the act.*

*Jim Elliot
In The Journals of Jim Elliot*



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READ

Matthew 7:15-23 Read slowly and think about the analogy of fruit. Where does it come from and how does it apply to the context here?

This little section of Matthew contains some sobering words on a couple different fronts. The primary direction here is in the very first phrase, “Watch out for false prophets.” Who you listen to is a very important element of your character growth and continued maturity in Christ. Should you follow the wrong person, headed in the wrong direction, you’ll invariably wind up in the wrong destination. If we’re talking about directions to the movies, minor problem; but if we’re talking about directions to eternity, the stakes are much, much higher. So how do we know? Jesus makes it plain and simple: It’s not how smart they are, nor is it how much they say that agrees with what you already may or may not believe to be true. Instead, you will know them by the fruit that they produce. Are they loving to others? Patient? Kind? Willing to set aside their own desires to see the needs of the lowliest individuals met? Be careful who you listen to - only the leader indwelt by the Spirit of God and transformed from the inside out will lead you toward God.

Prepare

Who do you consider to be your spiritual guides? List them here.

Why do you trust them so much? What is it about them that makes them worth following?

What evidence do you see that they are true “prophets” rather than false “prophets?”

Do you see any others around you that would also make good examples to be followed in your life?

Where do we go from here?

Find a mentor! If you don't have a person that you can rely on to go before you, someone that you can follow as they journey toward Christ, find one. There are men and women in your church, in your school, coaching your teams who would gladly spend extra time with you, praying with you and for you, asking you about your relationship with God, and pointing you toward the truth. All you need to do is ask one of them to spend that time.

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Luke 6:43-45 This parallel passage to Matthew 7 doesn't point directly to false prophets. Consider the principle of trees and fruit. In what ways are you a tree?

Luke's gospel record of this section of the sermon shares the very same thrust, and much of the same wording as Matthew's, but it does not introduce the section as a warning against false prophets. We can infer then that while the principle of good and bad fruit applies to spiritual direction, it goes beyond that and includes a call for self-examination. What kind of fruit am I producing? This passage makes it clear that there is no way that I can be a good tree and produce bad fruit. It won't happen - oh there may be the occasional fruit that falls off me that's rotten, but over time, I will be a consistent producer of godliness, assuming that I'm transformed by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, if I'm a bad tree, good fruit is not in my future. I may be able to fool people for a while with fruit that appears to be good, but given enough time, I will only yield fruit that is bitter and incapable of being pleasing. This is the fundamental question that each of us needs to deal with. It is the question of identity. Am I a tree, firmly rooted in faith in Christ, producing Godly fruit? Or am I a tree rooted in selfishness producing the fruit of sin?

Prepare

How do I know which type of tree that I am?

Be honest with yourself, and reflect on the fruit that others can “harvest” from your life. Which type of tree would your fruit reveal about who you are?

What are the Godly fruits evident in your life? What’s lacking? What should others see in you that they currently would not?

Does the bad fruit outweigh the good in you? Or is the bad fruit just an occasional one that falls off of your life? What fruit would others see in your life right now that you know does not reflect Christ in you?

Where do we go from here?

I think that you know what you need to do. Stop what you are doing, drop everything, and honestly take account of your life. Is it possible that you’re fooling even yourself into thinking that you have trusted Christ, when it’s very possible that you have not? If so, it’s only a matter of time until they see it too. “A bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”

Chapel Scripture

Thursday, April 28

MATTHEW 7:15-23 (NIV)

15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

21”Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Notes:

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READ

1 Samuel 15 In this story, pay careful attention to Saul's actions and the justification that he gives Samuel for them.

I bet Saul was a pretty cool guy. The Scriptures describe him as physically imposing, someone who stood out in a crowd. He was given a dream job with no applicable experience, and that job, while it came with a lot of responsibility, allowed Saul to make his own rules and pretty much do as he pleased. You've probably heard the quote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." (John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, 1877) This truism is seen in Saul. Think about what you want in life. Doesn't Saul's life sound great? He got everything without giving up anything! And it provided the perfect platform for the revelation of his corruption. In 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel says to Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice." Or put another way, "Your religious action doesn't fool anyone! You are bankrupt inside - where it matters!" Allow Saul to be a warning sign to you. If you expect to have an easy life, to be able to get what you want, only propping God up as a facade; be sure that your true colors will shine through. It will eventually be your corruption on display.

Reflect

Why are we all prone to using God and religious practice as “props” in our lives? Why not just actually trust God and do what He says? Why all the pretending?

How guilty are you of this pretending?

In what areas of your life, or in what relationships or settings do you fake it the most?

What can you do to starve out the hypocrisy and be the person you really are all the time, and not just in certain settings?

Where do we go from here?

Did you find a mentor? Now find a partner. Find a peer, someone you can trust to share the honest truth about your heart. Plan to meet privately with them and ask them to listen to you share your heart. Be honest about what's troubling you. Reveal the sin that is there, and ask them to pray with you and for you as you earnestly seek to have God transforming you from the inside out.