

## From Beginning To End: Part 4

### Pastor James Bell

Philippians 1:6 NLT

6 And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

We have discussed the past two weeks about growing root and taking root. And that roots serve two purposes, to feed and bring stability. And that unless the roots go deep then there will be no fruit. This week we will highlight what happens after the roots grow and take root. The manifestations of how well we have grown and taken root will show up at fruit level.

Matthew 7:16–20 NLT

16 You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. 19 So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. 20 Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

Jesus mentioned identifying false prophets by their fruit. So if you know what an apple tree looks like then you know what an orange tree looks like. They are both fruit bearing trees. But when we look deeper into the greek word of "False Prophet" we will find that it is not just a prophet that speaks false prophecy but the practice of teaching false doctrine in the name of God. This is not limited to a calling but extends to anyone that proclaims to know God. If you can identify a tree by its fruit then you can identify a person by how they act. Jesus said that they would look like the real thing. Their outward appearance alludes to genuineness but what is within is disguised with false humility.

Exodus 7:10–13 NLT

10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did what the LORD had commanded them. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a serpent! 11 Then Pharaoh called in his own wise men and sorcerers, and these Egyptian magicians did the same thing with their magic. 12 They threw down their staffs, which also became serpents! But then Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Pharaoh's heart, however, remained hard. He still refused to listen, just as the LORD had predicted.

Pharaoh's sorcerers looked to be of the power that Moses and Aaron operated under. But they did not serve the one true God. They had a form of Godliness but inwardly they were wolves. Paul spoke this to Timothy concerning the time we are living in.

2 Timothy 3:1-4 NLT

1 You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. 2 For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. 3 They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. 4 They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God.

But Pastor this has been going on from the beginning! And I would say that you have a very valid point but people that operated this way did not call themselves followers of God.

2 Timothy 3:5 NLT

5 They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.

So many within our society label themselves as "Christians". Barna did a study in 2025 and found that 66% of Americans identify as Christians. Of that 66% includes Catholics, Jehovah Witnesses, and Mormons. Why did I particularly point out these denominations? I would suggest that you do your homework and find out what these others believe and practice. You will find that there are things that are taught and believed are unscriptural. Of that 66%, 42% read their Bibles weekly. That number has increase by 12% from 2024. We would say that that increase is a good sign of change but however... Of that 42 % only 36% of that total number believe that the bible is accurate. This shows that "Engagement has outpaced conviction". Of the total of American Christians only 14% read their bibles four or more times a week.

Let's look at the numbers:

There are 342 million Americans

Of the 342 million, 66% identify as "Christians". That is a total of 225 million "Christians".

Of the 225 million, 42% read their bibles weekly. Total of 94 million "Christians".

Of the 94 million, 36% believe in its accuracy. For a total of 34 million.

This is why I stated that engagement is outpacing conviction.

Of that 34 million only 14% read their bibles 4 or more times a week. That total is 4.8 million “Christians”.

This means that 2.13% of “Christians” are allowing God to prune and purify them.

Look at this image on the screen:

Benefits of reading the Bible four or more times a week

**Improved emotional and mental well-being:**

- 30% less likely to struggle with loneliness
- 32% less likely to experience anger issues
- 40% less likely to feel bitter
- 30% less likely to struggle with depression or anxiety
- 32% less likely to think destructively about self or others

Reduced harmful behaviors:

- 57% less likely to struggle with alcoholism
- 68% less likely to engage in sex outside of marriage
- 61% less likely to view pornography

Increased spiritual engagement:

- 228% more likely to share their faith with others
- 407% more likely to memorize scripture
- 231% more likely to disciple others

Jesus made these statics plain when he spoke this parable:

John 15:1–8 NLT

1 “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. 5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

We have been and continue to be pruned how? In verse three Jesus said by the message I have given you. So what does John 1 say? Jesus is the word of God. It is the message of scripture that prunes and purifies us. As we discussed in Part 3 that there is no harvest without deep roots but Jesus also said that we are fruitless if we do not remain in him. So what does this look like? In the greek it means to continue in unity with in heart, mind, and will. Enduring forever. This is where the branch and the vine are one. There is continuous connection. Their resemblance is inseparable. And fruit is the tall tale sign of their connection. But Jesus took this a step further in verse eight. When we produce much fruit we are true disciples. Two key things that I see within these words. How do we produce much fruit? We remain connected and we are pruned. This brings forth maturity. Seven times Jesus used the same word of “remain”. Remaining indicates the time for growing. Growth happens over time. Pruning determines how we will grow. Pruning controls our shape and size. Pruning reroutes outwardly what is happening within. Pruning dictates where new growth occurs. These two things brings forth the much fruit that makes us true disciples.

Our fruit reveals what’s actually happening beneath the surface.

John 12:24–26 NLT

24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. 25 Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. 26 Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me...

Our dying to self is central to the fruit we will bear. Dying to self allows the roots to grow, take root, and bring forth a harvest. Fruit always tells on the the maturity of the plant. Our fruit will always speak louder than our words. A plant or a tree is sometimes

questionable of its kind until fruit comes forth. And fruit is the undeniable testimony of whether we are truly rooted. As we recall from last week from the parable of the sower that only one soil type brings forth a harvest.

Matthew 13:23 NLT

23 The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

Good soil is broken soil. Good soil is hearing the corrective and encouraging voice of God. Good soil is hear with attention and obeying it. Good soil is understanding the plan that God has laid out. Good soil is understanding the process. Good soil is knowing that all things are working for the good of the Kingdom of God. Good soil is knowing God's heart. This is fertile soil. This is where the mystery unravels. This is what determines the harvest. Operating in the hearing and understanding dictates how much is harvested. Jesus said some produce 30% while others will produce 60%. But what number is greater 30, 60, or 100? We may only produce 30% this season but should we be satisfied with 30% every season? Should we be satisfied with 60% every season? Jesus desires the more and He has supplied everything we need for the more. From Beginning to End. We have established this theme respectfully within these 4 parts. But we must move beyond the beginning and work our way to the end. Everything that God established was call to progress, never to sit still. When something sits still it becomes stagnant. Paul stated in:

Philippians 3:14–15 NLT

14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. 15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things.

God didn't just call us to a race but to run in such a way that we obtain the prize that only God can offer. The call of continual growth. The call of more fruit. The call of a deeper relationship with Him. In Matthew 25 where Jesus told the parable of the talents, which servants were rewarded and which servant was rewarded? Which of these servants produced more fruit and which servant maintained? God has not called us to maintain. God's call has not called us to sit still.

In closing:

Luke 2:41–52 NLT

41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. 42 When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. 43 After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His

parents didn't miss him at first, 44 because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. 46 Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. 47 All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his mother said to him, "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere." 49 "But why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 But they didn't understand what he meant. 51 Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart. 52 Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

When did Jesus grow in wisdom and the grace of God? When he forsaken who he once was. When he accepted the call to more fruit. When he was about His Fathers business. We have to forsaken our business and be able the Fathers business is we are going to grow into the more that God has called us to.

Let me pray with you today!