

# The Year of Fruit and Growth/ Installation of Community Life Pastor

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January 10, 2026

## Opening Monologue

Greetings AVC Family & Friends—we are back in action with the Church APP after a Christmas and brief New Year's break. Today's APP will be slightly different than usual, as it's a Special Sunday!

We are moving into our 20th year of ministry. My wife and I planted AVC and started the ministry right out of our home. God has been FAITHFUL... His faithfulness words cannot describe. As the Apostle Paul says: "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you..." (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Thank you, Jesus, for your faithfulness to the AVC Ministry!

Praise God, we have experienced much growth. We have well over 300 people who call AVC their church home... obviously they are not present each week; and honestly, with online streaming and worship, those numbers very well could exceed 400-plus.

As this week's sermon reflects, we are in a Year of "Fruit & Growth." Jesus said: "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The church has a responsibility in helping people grow as Christians (Ephesians 4:11-13). I, as the Senior Pastor of AVC, never want anyone to fall through the cracks or be overlooked. We see an example of this in Acts 6, when the widows were being overlooked as the ministry had grown.

Myself and the Elders of AVC recognize that one Senior Pastor cannot keep up with all the ministry demands. Because of this, we are calling long-time member, prior youth leader, and Elder Jerry Miller to be AVC's Community Life Pastor! Please join us this Sunday as we celebrate the installation of Pastor Jerry... you will also hear from his

heart.

Thank you, Jesus, for the AVC Family and for the individuals and families that make up our amazing body. Thank you for the gifts and talents you bestow among us. “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

As we step into this new season of fruitfulness and growth, may we all remain deeply connected to the Vine—Jesus Himself—so that together we bear abundant fruit for His glory. Let’s gather this Sunday with joyful hearts to worship, celebrate what God has done, install Pastor Jerry, and look forward in faith to all that our faithful God will continue to do among us. We can’t wait to see you there—because together, in Him, the best is yet to come!

Blessings In Christ,  
Rev. Brad Standfest

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**To Listen to this week’s Sermon: “The Year of Fruit & Growth” Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:**

**Web:** <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

**You Tube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

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## **Key Sermon Texts**

**John 15: 4-5**

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2015%3A%204-5&version=NIV>

**Ephesians 4:11-13**

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%204%3A11-13%20&version=NIV>

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## **Commentary on Main Scriptures**

## **The Year of Fruit & Growth: A Biblical Scholarly Reflection**

### **Jesus: The True Vine (John 15:4-5)**

*\*Jesus: The True Vine and Our Abiding Relationship\**

As Jesus and His disciples likely walked past the great golden vine adorning the front of the temple—a familiar symbol of Israel drawn from Old Testament imagery (Psalm 80:8-9)—He declared, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.” Israel had often been pictured as a vine, but frequently in a negative light, representing unfaithfulness and failure to produce good fruit (Isaiah 5:1-2, 7; Jeremiah 2:21). In striking contrast, Jesus presented Himself as the true vine—the genuine source of life and fruitfulness. In the New Covenant, our primary identity and rooting must be in Him, not in the nation of Israel or even in the church as an institution. Only by being connected to Jesus can we bear fruit for God.

This moment carried deep significance. As one writer, Alexander Whyte, poignantly observed: “He had often said it to Himself, but this was the first time He had ventured to announce it to His disciples. And what made Him speak so plainly that night was because He had just had the wine-cup in His hand, and had distributed it to His disciples; that wine-cup into which, as He looked down into it, He saw crushed all the grape-clusters of His whole life, as well as His heart’s-blood in Gethsemane that night and on Calvary next morning” (*The Walk, Conversation and Character of Jesus Christ our Lord*).

Jesus described His Father as the vinedresser—the One who cultivates, tends, and manages the vine, just as God did in the Old Testament imagery of Israel. Believers today enjoy a living relationship with both the Son (the vine) and the Father (the vinedresser).

He then explained the Father’s work: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” Branches that fail to bear fruit reveal they were never truly connected or abiding in the vine. Some scholars, including James Montgomery Boice, suggest the Greek word *airo* (translated “takes away”) might better be rendered “lifts up.” In ancient vineyards, unproductive branches lying on the ground were often lifted to receive more sunlight and air, encouraging better fruit production. This offers a hopeful picture: the Father gently lifts

struggling branches rather than hastily discarding them.

For those already bearing fruit, the Father prunes—a term sharing the same Greek root as “cleanses.” Pruning removes hindrances, allowing greater growth and fruitfulness. Jesus reassured His disciples: “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” God’s Word powerfully cleanses—it exposes sin, inspires holiness, fosters growth, and equips us for victory.

Jesus then emphasized the heart of the passage: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

The command to “abide” is ongoing and active—not a one-time decision, but a constant, moment-by-moment choice to remain connected to Christ. Abiding involves believing Jesus is God’s Son (1 John 4:15), receiving Him as Savior and Lord (John 1:12), obeying God’s commands (1 John 3:24), continuing in the gospel (1 John 2:24), and loving the community of believers (John 15:12). It is not passive; we actively live in vital dependence on Him.

A severed grapevine branch might survive briefly and produce leaves, but it cannot bear fruit without connection to the root. Similarly, apart from Jesus, our efforts—however well-intentioned—are ultimately fruitless. True fruit comes from life flowing from Him. As Andrew Murray beautifully captured: “The essential idea of fruit is that it is the silent natural restful produce of our inner life.” Fruit is not forced labor or human striving; it is the natural, restful outcome of the Spirit’s work within us—whether new converts drawn to Christ, the character of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), or both. Fruit attracts others to Jesus, reproducing life in the kingdom.

People don’t plant vineyards merely for attractive leaves; they cultivate them for the fruit. In the same way, our lives are meant to display God-shaped character and reproduce spiritual life. Abiding is mutual: we remain in Jesus, and He remains in us. He actively indwells and empowers us; the responsibility is shared in this dynamic relationship. (Guzik)

## **Bearing Fruit Requires Our Involvement**

Jesus made it clear in John 15:4-5: “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

In order to be productive, fruitful Christians, we have to remain in Jesus Christ. And if we remain in Christ, the promise of the Lord is that we will bear much fruit.

We have to get this through our thick skulls—yes, we can all have thick skulls, right? —that apart from Jesus Christ, we can do nothing. This doesn’t mean we can’t accomplish things in life; let’s be honest, many things we achieve on our own eventually fall flat or prove empty.

There’s a deep humbling in our hearts when we truly believe God’s Word. If we take it seriously, then without a shadow of a doubt, we will become fruitful Christians as we stay connected to Him.

The problem so many of us face is trying to do life solo. We attempt to accomplish things in our own strength, and we end up stuck in ruts—oppression, spiritual decay, and frustration. The Lord never created us to live isolated lives. Satan’s goal is to starve our faith, isolating us on a lonely, deserted island where we feel abandoned. But the Lord never abandons us—His Word clearly tells us that. Yet if we’re honest, we can push God to the back burner, treating Him like an afterthought, and then wonder why our lives feel like such a mess.

### **Jesus made it concise and clear:**

1. Remain in Him—which literally means to stay, to make our home, to dwell in Him continually.
2. You can’t bear fruit by yourself—no branch produces grapes when severed from the vine.
3. Apart from Christ we can do nothing—but with Christ, we can do all things, including bearing much fruit. (Echoing the truth in Philippians 4:13: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”)

This new year, let’s set the bar high. Let us follow Christ’s teaching so that we bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be His disciples. Bearing

fruit isn't about striving harder in our own power—it requires our active involvement in abiding. Stay connected to the Vine through prayer, obedience, Scripture, and loving fellowship. As we do, the life of Christ flows through us naturally, producing the character, love, and impact that glorify God and bless others.

Let's commit today: No more solo attempts. No more back-burner faith. Remain in Him and watch Him produce much fruit in and through you.

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## **Ephesians 4:11-13**

### **God's Calling Helps the Church Bear Fruit**

In the same way that Jesus described Himself as the true vine in John 15, calling us to abide in Him so that we might bear much fruit, the Apostle Paul shows us in Ephesians how God equips His people through specific callings to produce that very fruit in the life of the church. God doesn't leave us to figure out spiritual growth or gospel impact on our own—He actively calls and gifts leaders to build up the body of Christ, enabling every believer to bear fruit that glorifies Him.

### **We read in Ephesians 4:11-13**

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

**The Apostle Paul clearly lists some of the key spiritual gifts and callings poured out by Christ:** apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Notice that all of these roles are directly tied to spreading and living out the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Apostles means "sent ones"—those commissioned and sent to establish and extend the church's foundation.
- Prophets are messengers of God, speaking His truth to guide and correct.
- Evangelists are those who go out to proclaim and spread the good

news boldly.

- Pastors (or shepherds) care for and guide God's people with compassion and protection.
- Teachers faithfully instruct in the truth of God's Word, helping believers grow in understanding and application.

All these giftings affect the church directly. How? Paul explains it plainly: these leaders are given "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." The Greek word translated "prepare" (or "equip" in many versions) is *katartismos*—a term that conveys fully equipping, mending, restoring, or making someone complete and fit for purpose. In ancient contexts, it could describe mending fishing nets (as in Matthew 4:21) or preparing something to function properly. In the church, it means equipping believers, so they are spiritually ready, restored where broken, and fully outfitted for effective service—not just to sit passively, but to actively participate in God's work.

**The goal is twofold:** first, "works of service" (*diakonia*)—meaning every believer is called to use their God-given gifts and abilities in practical, loving ministry. The whole body of Christ is summoned to this! We're not called just to fill a seat, be spectators, or act as cheerleaders for Jesus. The Lord wants us in the game. He didn't give you gifts and abilities for them to go unused. Think about that and ponder it: What has the Lord gifted you with? How are you using those gifts for His glory within the church body?

Second, these callings lead to the "building up" (*oikodome* in Greek) of the body of Christ. *Oikodomē* literally means "building" or "edification"—like constructing or strengthening a structure. In the New Testament, it's used metaphorically for spiritual strengthening, growth, and development. In modern terms, "building up" means encouraging, fortifying, and helping others mature in faith—creating a stronger, healthier community where everyone contributes to mutual growth.

**Verse 13 wraps it all up:** this equipping and building continues "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." In a paraphrase, it's something like this: so that the body of Christ would be united in deep faith and intimate knowledge of

Jesus Christ—so in turn, we become mature, bearing the fruit of Christ in our lives and shining as lights in the world. This is the foundation of our faith in Him.

God's calling on leaders isn't about creating a celebrity class or doing all the work themselves—it's about equipping every believer to bear fruit. As we abide in Christ (the Vine) and respond to His equipping through these gifted servants, the church grows strong, unified, and fruitful. We overcome challenges, navigate hardships, and build one another up. Lord willing, as we are built up, we can then build others up—that truly is the heart of Christian theology.

So let's embrace this: Stay connected to Jesus, receive the equipping God provides through His called leaders, step into your gifts, and watch the church bear abundant fruit for His glory. (Rev. Standfest, LOGOS Bible)

**4:11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.** This expands on the thought begun in 4:7–8 regarding the gifts Christ gave. In this context, these gifts are actually people who have been called to special functions. Not all people have all the gifts, for Paul was clear to explain that some would be gifted in one area and some in another. The list given here is by no means complete (for other types of gifts, see Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). According to the Greek, all the people listed are direct objects of “gave,” indicating that God gave these people to the church as gifts. The offices listed here focus mainly on those who proclaim the gospel and teach the truth.

**First listed are the apostles and prophets, about whom we have already read.** They are the foundation for Christ's temple (see 2:20 and 3:6 and commentary there). “Apostles” included the eleven men Jesus called (without Judas), plus others who are called apostles—such as Paul himself (Romans 1:1), Matthias (Acts 1:26), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Jesus' brother James (Galatians 1:19), Silas (1 Thessalonians 2:6), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7). It seems that the qualifications for being an apostle were to have seen the risen Christ, to have been sent out by him to preach the gospel, and to be working on behalf of the kingdom, building its foundation (as noted in 2:20). Paul also notes “signs, wonders, and miracles” as marks of a



true apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12).

**God also gave prophets to the church.** These people, also laborers on the church's "foundation" (2:20), had special gifts in ministering God's messages to his people. At times they would foretell the future (Acts 11:28; 21:9, 11), but more often their job was to exhort, encourage, and strengthen God's people (Acts 15:32; 1 Corinthians 14:29). God spoke through prophets—inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places.

The evangelists were the traveling ministers, similar to the missionaries of today. They went to non-Christian people and proclaimed the gospel to them, often being the first to start a church in a particular area (Acts 21:8; 2 Timothy 4:5).

Next, God gave pastors and teachers. These two gifts are likely the same. While the apostles, prophets, and evangelists had a universal sphere of function (the church as a whole), the pastors and teachers probably served in the local churches. Like shepherds, they tended God's "flock," handling the day-to-day affairs of their congregation—administering, counseling, guiding, feeding.

**4:12 To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. These specially gifted people (4:11) were given to the church for one ultimate goal:** to

equip the saints. The word for "equip" means to make right, like the setting of a broken bone, or to bring to completion by training or restoring. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers furnish and equip the believers to do the work of the ministry, which results in the building up the body of Christ. The church builds itself in the faith as the members care for one another, show love, and generally manifest the other gifts God gives (as mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12). Yet the church also builds itself as it reaches out to its surrounding community with the love of Christ, drawing others into the fold. God has given his church an enormous responsibility—to make disciples in every nation (Matthew 28:18–20). This involves preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administering, building, and many other tasks. Fulfilling this command solo would be impossible. But God calls us as members of his body. No one should be a bystander, an observer. Everyone must do the work of

ministry. Some of us can do one task; some can do another. Together we can obey God more fully than any of us could alone. We tend to overestimate what we can do by ourselves and underestimate what we can do as a group. But as the body of Christ, we can accomplish more together than we could dream possible working by ourselves. Working together, the church can express the fullness of Christ.

**4:13 Until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.**

The word “until” indicates that the process described in 4:12 must continue until a certain end is achieved—when all believers come to (arrive at, attain) unity (see Philippians 3:11). While unity of the Spirit must be maintained (4:3), unity in our faith must be attained. The “unity of faith” means a unity of belief in Christ himself, and this belief relates intrinsically to our knowledge of him. The goal includes making a united effort to live out and proclaim this faith.

Unity in our knowledge refers to fuller and more complete experiential knowledge. Every believer must have a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul here called him God's Son, showing that this knowledge includes an appropriate understanding of the new relationship with the Father that has been provided by the Son (Romans 8:10–17).

This unified body of believers is called to be mature and full grown, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. The focus is on “we” in this verse—every believer as part of the entire body. This metaphor means that the church, as Christ's body, must match the Head in growth and maturity. This does not speak of perfection (impossible in this life) but of growth—such as children growing into adults, which ties into the following advice regarding this growth. (See Luke 2:52, where Jesus grew “in stature.”) (LABC)

**Resources:** Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos Bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. Barton, Bruce B. 1993. John. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. Guzik, David. 2013. John. David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible. Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik. Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1996. Ephesians.

## Sermon Notes:

Good morning, everyone... Let me say... I feel like Preaching Today...  
(Had Few weeks off)

Before we Pray & Hop into God's Word This Exciting Day Let me give you the AVC Connections...

YouTube, App, Facebook/ Website

[Let's Pray]

2026 Is going to be a Great and Exciting New Year... But it's going to require you to go a Little Deeper in your Faith...

When I was Listening to the Lord in this New Year... I heard the Holy Spirit's voice say...

It's The Year of Fruit & Growth

It's The Year of Fruit & Growth and it's Rooted in Jesus' Words

**John 15: 4-5** Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

It's Impossible for you Not to Bear Fruit & Grow if you do what Jesus says: Let's Break Down what Jesus is saying (It's not hard)

You Must "Stay" "Dwell" (Remain) in Christ... Walking with Jesus Daily Jesus' Promise is I will "Stay/Dwell" in you

Let Christ's words Sink into your Soul... You can't Bear Fruit by yourself (v.4)

You Can't do it Solo... Life is not meant to be a Solo Act...

Some of you have had some Serious Spiritual Decay because your trying to do it On Your Own... Listen... Satan wants you Stuck in a Rut... He wants to Starve your relationship with Jesus...

Satan has Launched a Spirit on People's Lives & Homes

Here's a Word from the Holy Spirit: We must get out of Crisis Mode  
Jesus said: If a man Remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit... (John 15:5b)

Here is a Bearing Fruit Snapshot... (Pic of Apples)

Friends... It's the Year of Fruit & Growth...

God's Word says the Church has a Responsibility to help you Grow in Christ...

Ephesians 4:11-13 So, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets the evangelist, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

As the Senior Pastor of AVC I am 1000% Dedicated to making sure this body is Built up & Equipped...

Hear Me... I want No One to Fall through the Cracks or be Overlooked...

We see examples in the O.T. & N.T. where Additional Leaders had to be put in place to care for God's people...

[Short Story of Jethro]

We Read in the N.T. that Widows were being Overlooked and the Elders gathered together and said this isn't right

They said: PP "Let's choose some men full of the Spirit and wisdom and will turn this responsibility over to them." (Acts 6- Full Story)

The Elders and I Recognize that the Almont Vineyard Church requires more than One Pastor to help Oversee and Shepherd it...- Given This:

Today I am Happy to Announce to you... We are Calling Jerry Miller to be the Community Life Pastor at Almont Vineyard Church...

At this time I am going to Call Jerry to Come Up and share his heart for this calling...

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## **Pastor Jerry's Vision & Key Responsibilities**

## **Please view Pastor Jerry's Encouragement to the body ONLINE**

**Caring for the flock as in John 21:15-17, building up the body as in Ephesians 4:11-16, and equipping disciples to multiply as in Matthew 28:19-20.**

### **Community Life Pastor Roles & Responsibilities**

(Helping people bear fruit at Almont Vineyard Church)

#### **1. Care Ministry - Walking with People When Life Is Hard**

- Provide hands-on pastoral care through hospital and home visits, offering support during illness, grief, crisis, life transitions, and celebrations, ensuring no one falls through the cracks in a growing ministry.
- Offer biblical encouragement, prayer, active listening, and short-term counsel; make appropriate referrals to professional counselors when needed.
- Oversee the church's benevolence ministries, including meals, hospitality, food pantry, and coordinating practical assistance across other help ministries.
- Recruit, train, equip, and shepherd volunteer care teams serving in areas such as hospital visitation, meal trains, prayer teams, funeral support, and related ministries.

#### **2. Connection & Belonging Ministry - Helping People Find Their People and Place**

- Lead the assimilation process to help first-time guests become fully engaged and relationally connected members through welcoming experiences, follow-up strategies, and starting point to membership classes.
- Create and maintain clear next steps that guide every attender from "visitor" to "family" within the church community.
- Partner with ministry leaders to ensure all attenders have meaningful opportunities to belong and serve.

#### **3. Spiritual Formation & Leadership Development**

- Come alongside the AVC family to guide them into discipleship pathways, helping believers progress from new converts to mature

believers who multiply disciples.

- Identify, mentor, train, and raise up emerging leaders specifically within the care and connection ministries.
  - Collaborate closely with the Senior Pastor and staff team to align all community life strategies with the church's mission, vision, and values.
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## Devotional Questions & Reflections

**1. Abiding in the Vine:** Jesus says, “Abide in Me, and I in you... apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). In what specific ways have you been actively remaining connected to Christ this week (through prayer, Scripture meditation, obedience, or loving fellowship)? How has isolation or “solo attempts” at life hindered your spiritual fruitfulness in the past, and what one step can you take to deepen your abiding today?

**2. Recognizing True Fruit:** The commentary highlights that fruit is the “silent natural restful produce of our inner life”—not forced striving, but the Spirit's outflow (e.g., love, joy, peace from Galatians 5:22-23; new believers drawn to Christ; kingdom impact). Reflect on your life: What evidence of genuine fruit (rather than just leaves or activity) do you see emerging from your connection to Jesus? Where might you be producing “empty” achievements that lack eternal value?

**3. Pruning and Lifting Up:** The Father as Vinedresser prunes fruitful branches for more fruit and may “lift up” (airo) unproductive ones to encourage growth rather than discard them. How has God pruned you in seasons past (through trials, conviction via His Word, or correction) to increase your fruitfulness? Are there areas in your life right now where you sense the Vinedresser gently lifting you—perhaps through struggle or dryness—and how can you respond in trust rather than resistance?

**4. The Church's Equipping Role:** Ephesians 4:11-13 teaches that Christ gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip believers for works of service, building up the body toward maturity. In what ways has your local church (or leaders like

pastors/elders) equipped you to use your gifts? How might you more actively receive this equipping instead of trying to grow “solo”?

**5. Using Your Gifts for Mutual Growth:** All believers are ministers, called to works of service (diakonia) to build up (oikodome) the body. What spiritual gifts or talents has God placed in you (even if you’re still discovering them)? How can you use them this year to encourage, strengthen, or help others in the church bear more fruit—rather than leaving them unused?

**6 Bearing Much Fruit Together:** As branches cannot bear fruit apart from the Vine, neither can the church or individuals thrive in isolation. Looking ahead in this “Year of Fruit & Growth,” how can abiding in Christ personally lead to collective fruitfulness in your church (e.g., new disciples, transformed lives, community impact)? Commit to one way you will partner with the body this year to help others abide, grow, and bear abundant fruit for God’s glory.