NOVEMBER 22, 2026
SERIES 3: JOY IN THANKSGIVING
LESSON 3.4: FAITHFUL AND FRUITFUL

TRUTH ABOUT GOD
God created us to bear fruit.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE
Through God's Spirit, I will bear fruit.

LESSON TEXT MARK 11:12–25; JOHN 15:5

KEY PASSAGE JOHN 15:5
I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

TEACHING OUTLINE
ICEBREAKER: What is the strangest fruit you have ever tried?
TEACHER TIP: Connect the group's answers to the story of Jesus looking for fruit on a fig tree on His way to Jerusalem.
CONNECT: Share the Connect segment.

I. JESUS REQUIRES FRUIT
   A. The Figless Fig Tree
   B. Jesus' Response
      DISCUSS: *What are some early warning signs of spiritual decline in times of fruitlessness?*
   C. The Disciples' Response
   D. I will allow the Spirit to bear fruit in me.
      DISCUSS: *How does the Christian's approach to spiritual formation compare to self-help methods of personal growth?*

II. THE SPIRIT BEARS FRUIT
   A. Faith and Forgiveness
   B. Good Seed on Good Ground **(V)**
      DISCUSS: *What fruit of the Spirit is currently being cultivated in your life?*
   C. Through God's Spirit, I will bear fruit.

APPLY: Share the Apply segment. **(I)**

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer for God to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

CONNECT

IN TODAY'S WORLD, fruit is an everyday commodity. We can realistically think of eating an orange at every breakfast or an apple during every lunch. However, fruit production is a long-term commitment. If you have ever walked through a cider mill and imagined yourself leaving the office life for a life of horticultural bliss, you should know what you would be getting into. Orchards require a great deal of money, time, presence, and planning before they give back any sweet produce.

First, a farmer must consider the investment required in establishing an orchard. Planting and pruning are expensive processes, and trees can take many seasons before they are completely productive and profitable. Innovative technologies have helped matters, but costs have increased as well. (Think $30,000 an acre or more.) Plan to lose money for several years before the costs are equal to the profit. Not all trees produce the same. For example, a fast-growing fig tree can bear fruit in two or three years. However, a full-sized apple tree can take around eight to ten years before reaching fruit-bearing maturity. Some fruit will take longer to cultivate than others.

Carefully consider the location of your orchard. A good site will have adequate light, some slope for good airflow, and permeable soil, allowing water to drain properly. Knowing the history of the previous crop will allow you to replant successfully. Old roots must be removed, as they can damage new plants. Some fruit requires support from other pollinating trees.

But you're not yet done. Your orchard also needs irrigation. Trees will need water from the moment they are planted. Dry roots will die. When a tree shows signs of growth, water again, providing consistent water supply at an absorbable rate. Protect your growing crop. Young trees are particularly attractive to foraging deer, and an orchard can be destroyed in a single season. Build strong fences to prevent wildlife from damaging your orchard. Boundaries are essential. Smaller pests can be just as threatening to a crop. Invest in herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, fungicides, and bactericides. Use netting to prevent sunburn and hail damage. Train your trees so they grow upright (treefruit.wsu.edu, "Orchard Establishment").

It's easy to see why Jesus adopted agricultural metaphors to describe spiritual growth. It takes great cost, hard work, and patience to grow a single apple. It also takes more than good intentions to produce spiritual fruit. We may have an idealized version of ourselves that is productive and fruitful, having realized our potential. But moving from ideal to real takes long-term investment and practical planning. With the right investment and care, we can become fruitful Christians who share a harvest of spiritual fruit to bless the world.

LEARN

I. JESUS REQUIRES FRUIT

Fruitfulness is the natural expectation of every disciple of Jesus. It is not optional, but a requirement for following and abiding in Jesus Christ. Fruitless branches—individuals who show no character transformation or lasting change—are "cast forth" from the vine and destroyed (John 15:6). Fruitlessness is indicative of disease or

disconnection. While unfruitful branches will be destroyed, disciples who abide in Christ and have Christ abiding in them will produce fruit (verses 2–5). We abide in Christ by continuing in His love and His teachings. Christ abides in us through His Word and His Spirit. Fruitfulness is not the sole product of human effort but the result of the life-giving power that issues from Jesus.

A. The Figless Fig Tree

In Mark 11, as Jesus journeyed from Bethany to the Temple in Jerusalem, He grew hungry. As He passed a fig tree, from a distance He could see the tree's leaves, signaling it may be offering early figs. However, when He came close to the tree, He found that the tree only had leaves but no figs. In verse 13, Mark commented that it was not yet the season for fruit.

In several prophetic passages, such as Micah 7 and Jeremiah 8, Israel is symbolized as a fig tree lacking fruit, specifically early figs, or the first fruit. According to Hosea 9, God cursed the nation with barrenness. Mark referenced the fig tree's leaves twice, helping us understand the tree was promising fruit but delivering none. Further, the timing in this story matters because Jesus cursed the fig tree with barrenness as He entered into Jerusalem.

He first visited the Temple and left after He witnessed the money changers and merchants keeping people from getting closer to God. When Jesus returned the following day, He cleansed it from the merchants and money changers. Just as the leafy fig falsely advertised food to the hungry, the grandeur of the Temple falsely advertised holiness and access to worshipers but only delivered greed and corruption. We are cautioned against a form of religion that appeals to the eyes but lacks the fruit of our maturity. Leaves on the branches may provide a beautiful view, but a fruitless tree cannot feed the hungry.

B. Jesus' Response

Jesus cursed the tree, saying, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever," and His disciples heard Him (verse 14). His response was not simply the frustrated overreaction of someone in need of a snack. Jesus used the fig tree to illustrate the spiritual state of Israel and issued a warning to future followers. Just as Scripture promises blessing to the fruitful, Jesus issued sharp warnings to the fruitless. In His final conversations with the disciples before His crucifixion, Jesus taught: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:1–2). Purging and pruning are unavoidable, but fruitlessness is not an option for a follower of Jesus. In every season, we are either renewing our values and drawing closer to Jesus or forsaking our values and drifting further from Him.

DISCUSS: *What are some early warning signs of spiritual decline in times of fruitlessness?*

C. The Disciples' Response

After Jesus cursed the tree with perpetual barrenness and cast the profiteers from the Temple, He raised the ire of the scribes and chief priests. Then Jesus left the city. The next morning the disciples saw the same fig tree Jesus cursed

had already dried up from the roots. Suddenly Peter remembered Jesus' words and expressed his amazement, stating, "Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away." Jesus replied, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:21–22).

The disciples took for granted Jesus' judgment of wrath on the fig tree but later realized the gravity of the act. The same power at work to heal blind eyes, restore withered hands, and raise the dead called forth a miracle of destruction. The tree did not simply lose its leaves, develop disease, or lose a few branches. It dried up from the root. It was good for nothing but firewood.

Sometimes actions speak louder than words. Many people today commend Jesus as a wise teacher or miracle worker. His comfort to the poor, His teaching on ethics, and His compassionate acts are approved and even applauded within and without the church. However, fewer heed Jesus' warnings of judgment. Peter was surprised to see that destruction came exactly where Jesus said it would. If Jesus was serious about a fig tree, how much more should we heed His warnings about fruitless disciples?

D. I will allow the Spirit to bear fruit in me.

Peruse your local bookstore or check the online best-seller lists and you will find yourself swimming in self-help recommendations. While spiritual growth involves discipline, systems, and structures, producing spiritual fruit cannot be reduced to human effort alone. The most essential factor for spiritual development is faithfully abiding, or remaining, in Jesus Christ. A flowered branch that is cut may make a magnificent display, but disconnected from a root structure, it wilts and dies. It can do nothing to prevent its decay. Similarly, we participate in God's process of growth, but we must ultimately realize that fruit is the product of His grace.

God prunes us for our benefit, removing the parts of our lives that are unprofitable and hinder growth. For those who abide in Christ and allow His Spirit to abide in us, the promise of harvest is plentiful. Abiding disciples don't simply bear fruit; they bear "much fruit" (John 15:5). Pruning shears are sharp, but Jesus prunes us so we are more fruitful for Him and to our world around us.

> **DISCUSS:** *How does the Christian's approach to spiritual formation compare to self-help methods of personal growth?*

II. THE SPIRIT BEARS FRUIT

A. Faith and Forgiveness

In Mark 11:22–23, Jesus' challenge to Peter, "Have faith," was followed by a practical explanation. Jesus expanded the disciples' current picture of faith, saying those who believe and do not doubt are capable of mountain-moving, not just tree-wilting. Faith is more than just a show of confidence; faith comes from our soul. We can claim to believe and speak to mountains to move, yet struggle with the internal tension caused by hidden doubts.

The kind of radical faith Jesus described is more than a statement of belief or willpower. Faith is trust that proceeds from relationship with an involved God who has a proven history of responding to us. Thus, faith itself is built in the act of abiding. As the Spirit abides in us, He grants us the supernatural power to believe beyond our past

disappointments and our limited imagination of the future.

The direct application is to pray with assurance that our requests are granted. God is all powerful and omniscient, possessing perfect knowledge about future events. A yes from God is so sure, we can receive His promises as already done before we actually observe the answer in time. In the kingdom of God, prayer is not simply a therapeutic exercise to make ourselves feel better about the things we cannot change. While we acknowledge God's sovereignty, prayer is the chosen strategy whereby we invite the authority and power of God in our world. Put simply, prayer really changes things. Even as faith is the fruit of abiding, the prayers we pray in faith will surely bear fruit.

Prayer provides an opportunity to address unforgiveness. In communion with God, we forgive others so we can be forgiven. If we refuse to forgive, we limit God's mercy in our lives, thus limiting the effectiveness of our own prayers. As we extend mercy to others, God extends mercy to us. Forgiveness expresses faith—trust that God's justice is perfect and His grace is sufficient to bring about wholeness where we have been wounded.

B. Good Seed on Good Ground

God's Word is good news and good seed. Goodness is in its nature; therefore, God's Word will always produce good fruit. Our response to the Word determines the degree of our fruitfulness. A farmer can invest in seeds of the highest cost and quality. A good seed carries all the potential of a crop that is tasty, plentiful, and disease resistant. However, the state of the field will determine whether the seeds yield feast or failure.

Jesus described some hearers as the wayside, where the seed is never received into the ground. Lying on the surface, the seed is snatched up and consumed by birds. To His disciples, Jesus clarified that the wayside represents those who never understand the Word that has been sown into their hearts, so it is stolen by the devil (Matthew 13:19). The surface is a perilous place, as is neglecting to seek to understand God's Word.

Some seed falls into stony ground (verses 20–21). These seeds represent people who initially hear God's Word and respond enthusiastically, showing great passion and promise. But quick visible growth masks a lack of depth. Without roots, they are unable to draw strength from the source of strength in times of trial. Endurance is short lived, and they cannot endure testing or persecution for the Word's sake.

Other seeds fall on thorny ground (verse 22). Though they may initially take root, they do not bear fruit because of competing weeds. Those weeds—those distractions and pursuits—choke our time and attention, and ultimately our ability to bear good fruit. When our priorities are out of order, we spend our time, resources, and attention on everything but our calling to be and make disciples. Ignorance leaves us vulnerable to attack; rootlessness leads us to be offended; worldliness leads us to fruitlessness. All these ground-level examples reveal that fruit issues are really root issues.

The Parable of the Sower helps us understand why the gospel does not affect every hearer the same way. Some disregard the Word, some forsake the Word, and others deprioritize the Word. However, this parable should not provoke us to become community dirt inspectors. Instead, we should apply the Word with a sense of self-evaluation. We must hear the Word, understand it, receive it into good ground, and eliminate anything that tries to choke out

God's Word. Those who receive well will bring forth fruit, "some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (verse 23). Not all will produce the same quantity of fruit, but every disciple can experience abundance.

(V) PLAY VIDEO NOW

DISCUSS: *What fruit of the Spirit is currently being cultivated in your life?*

C. Through God's Spirit, I will bear fruit.

If your fruit tastes a little rotten or empty branches alarm you, look to the roots. Begin by asking a simple question: How do I respond to the Word of God? Do I listen with curiosity? Am I open to learning? Do I allow the Word to take root through repetition and application? Do life's distractions quiet its voice?

If the ground is good, the seed will grow. We must abide in Jesus Christ to receive God's Word with reverence. Fruit is the reward of slow growth throughout changing seasons. If we are patient with the process, submit to the pruning, and remain faithful in tending, the harvest of righteousness will exceed our expectations. Fortunately, we don't bear the responsibility of growth alone. As we surrender to the voice of the Spirit, we will see grace at work. Have faith. Don't forsake the field. Don't forgo the process of becoming who God has called you to be.

TEACHER OPTION: *Share the story below or one of your own to illustrate the importance of a firm foundation.*

APPLY

FOUNDATION SINKING, OR erosion, is a common threat to historical buildings. Master Builder Gus Adams describes the process of lifting a historic home as "protecting the past from the future." As we might imagine, lifting a house even a few feet requires expert work. Utilities are disconnected, the home is lifted with huge steel beams and hydraulic jacks, truckloads of dirt are removed, wooden support cribs are placed, and concrete is poured. Because shifting a building is precarious work, fragile structures might be lifted as little as one-eighth of an inch per day. Lifting a home is expensive and dangerous but is often the only solution in the long-term. Lifting a building in place to restore its foundation is one thing, but moving a building poses an even greater set of challenges.

(I) DISPLAY IMAGE NOW

Moving buildings is hard enough, but what about when the location is precarious? A cliff is a particularly risky place to build, but it is the necessary foundation for some lighthouses. Around 1691, due to frequent shipwrecks, people petitioned for a lighthouse to be placed along a hazardous coastline. In 1828 a wooden lighthouse was constructed and proved to be successful at preventing shipwrecks. A permanent structure, the Belle Tout Lighthouse in Beachy Head, England, was built in 1832 and deliberately placed one hundred feet back from the cliff's edge. Its light was visible for twenty miles out to sea and obscured by the cliff's edge when ships sailed too close. However, gradual erosion made the lighthouse ineffective and dangerous to its keepers.

A new lighthouse was built at the base of the cliffs, and in 1902, the Belle Tout Lighthouse was decommissioned. It

traded owners a few times, serving as a family home, a surgeon's quarters, target practice to Canadian troops in World War II, and a filming location for the BBC. Maintained for its historic value, the lighthouse was moved fifty-six feet in 1999, restored, and currently serves as a public bed and breakfast. However, erosion continues and the lighthouse will likely need to be moved again in the next twenty to thirty years, should the current rate of erosion continue. In March of 2025, a large new crack appeared on the cliff's face, reminding visitors of the hazards of the location (belletout.co.uk, "The History of the Belle Tout Lighthouse").

Whether you are cultivating a crop or building a home, the same principle is true: The foundation matters for the whole project. An eroding foundation can cause the whole building to sink beyond habitation. Foundation evaluation is not just a new-believer issue. No matter how faithfully we have stood, how attractive the amenities, how significant our history, we must pay attention to our foundation. Each passing hour enhances our caution rather than diminishing it. Our future and our fruitfulness depend on it. To strengthen your foundation, take some time in your personal study of the Bible to evaluate your responsiveness to the Word. Create an effective system for study, devotion, and application.