

The “Secret” to a Fruitful Ministry

I am not impressed by newly discovered “secrets.” When someone announces they have cracked the “Bible codes” or uncovered some “amazing facts” that have been kept from the general public by a tightly controlled conspiracy, I am skeptical to say the least. The “secrets” invariably turn out to be either pure hokum or a repackaging of something that human beings have known for a long time.

So when I announce to you that there is a secret to fruitful ministry, understand that it isn’t really a secret in terms of new information. This secret has been hiding in plain sight for a long time. It is only a secret in the sense that it flies in the face of conventional wisdom.

Here it is from the lips of Jesus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24 ESV).

There you have it. The big secret to your ministry’s fruitfulness is to ***die where you’re planted***. It is only by dying – by completely surrendering to the Lord *where you are* – that you can hope to live a fruitful life for Him.

One of the biggest obstacles to fruitful ministry is not engaging fully where you are, but instead looking to some other place or set of circumstances, the “greener pastures” that you just know are out there waiting for you. Do you find yourself saying things like, “When things calm down I’ll...” or “When the right opportunity comes along I’ll...” or “When we finally get settled I’ll...”? It never happens! Things never settle down. Conditions never align just right. As I heard Rick Warren say, “If you wait for perfect circumstances, you’ll never get anything done.” Not engaging fully where you are is just another way of refusing to surrender to the Lord and trying to direct your own success.

Jesus equated the grain of wheat that refused to fall into the ground with His followers who try to direct their own lives: “Whoever loves his life loses it” (v25a). Read “loves” as “holds onto” and “is self-serving with.” It doesn’t work. The more we try to engineer our circumstances and success, the more we lose out. It’s like gripping sand. The tighter you squeeze, the more you lose. The more effort we put into keeping our lives on our terms, the more of it that leaks out through the cracks and crevices. On the other hand, Jesus said, “Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (v25b). Read “hates” as “surrenders control of” and “serves Me with.”

So clearly the prerequisite for living a fruitful life is dying to selfish ambitions and worldly aspirations. Your agenda must be replaced by the Lord’s agenda, and that means He puts you where He wants you for His purposes. Ministry leader, *have you died yet?*

Once you die, the definition of success becomes very simple: Serving and following Jesus. As the Lord Himself said, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also” (v26a). The problem is that we often measure success by outcomes or by comparing to

someone else. Let me ask you this: Does the grain of wheat get to decide how big its crop will be? No, it just dies where it's planted. It simply surrenders and submits to the conditions of the soil. Factors beyond the grain of wheat's control decide how big the crop will be.

Ministry leader, the size of your "crop" is not your responsibility. Such things are above your pay grade. The size of your commitment and surrender to the Lord *is* your responsibility. Success means faithfulness to the Lord and His call. Let Him worry about the size of the crop.

And by the way, there is very good news for those who chose to live by dying: "If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (v26b), Jesus says. What? Huh? The Father will honor *us*? Yes, that is what the Bible says. God will honor those who live the die-where-you're-planted life. Now what could be better than enjoying that for eternity?

So here's the bottom line. The secret to a fruitful ministry is not to worry about the fruit, but to die where you're planted. Once you've died, the purpose of your ministry becomes real simple – doing what God's called you to do in a way that honors Him. That is true success and the kind of life the Father honors.

Here are some thoughts about applying the lesson of the grain of wheat.

1. *Who you are and where you are is no accident.* Quit wishing you were someone or somewhere else or you'll squander your only opportunity to serve Jesus and live a fruitful life. Get started here. Get started now.

2. *Refuse to play the comparison game.* It is irrelevant what someone else is doing or what size their crop is. The comparison game only leads to pride or discouragement. Both are an affront to God.

3. *Make dying the focus of your praying.* Ask the Lord what the dying principle – "Less about me, more about Thee" – should look like in your present circumstances. Ask Him to show you how to fall into the ground and die and trust Him to do something beautiful through you.

Ministry leaders, let's die where we're planted and trust the Lord to produce his crop through us.