

# INGREDIENTS FOR GROWTH

July 16, 2017 | Pastor Randy Remington

Most of us studying this lesson, have the privilege of living in the beautiful northwest. We all know how well fruit grows in our climate, strawberry's, blueberry's etc. There are many gardens mentioned in the scriptures, the original garden, Eden, the garden of Gethsemane, etc. A garden is also used as a metaphor in scripture many times.

Today we will talk about a garden, but this garden is far more than plants and eatable fruit. In the garden we look at in our study today, we will see ourselves and learn what the conditions are for growth for us.

In this story, we will see a gardener; this is the type of caretaker you want working in this important garden. We will learn that he is an "advocate". As we read, see if you recognize him and also ask do you see yourself?

*"Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9)*

The context of this parable is important. They have just finished a conversation about bad, even terrible things that happen to people and if they did something wrong or sinful. So Jesus tells this parable.

Basically, there are two purposes for parables;

- 1) Insight into a truth; the Kingdom of God (Much of the culture was illiterate so Jesus told stories)
- 2) The second purpose was to hide the truth. But to those who pressed in, it would become clear; on the other hand the religious leaders would dismiss them.

## Disappointment, Anger and Frustration

As we go through our life and our walk with Jesus, we say; "this is not what I expected", many times we conclude; *"Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"*

I wonder how many times we say to ourselves when we don't see fruit in our own lives; "why should it/I even take up space". It is a "cutting" response to failure, stumbling, etc. We feel disappointment, even anger and frustration. "Cut it down"

A common response to this will be anger, guilt or shame. "How could I have done that again", "I should be beyond this". "Cut it down"

Think about peoples general response to church, Jesus or God..."I don't need any more guilt".

*"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." (Ephesians 4:26-27)*

But we see an "advocate" in this story. "I'll work at it some more", *"leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it."* I'm so thankful for our advocate, Jesus, "let's give it some time".

We need three things, truth, grace and time:

## 1. Truth

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, **full of grace and truth**...For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**" (John 1:14, 17)*

There is no grace without truth and there is no true relationship with our father without truth.

His truth penetrates, it digs below the surface. Can you imagine your mechanic or even your doctor who says nothing but positive things to you? Later you get into a crash or you have a medical crisis..."but we didn't want to offend you".

But God wants to have a relationship of trust; He is more concerned about you being whole and healthy. It may hurt at first but we need truth. We must have people in our lives who speak the truth in love;

*"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)*

*"Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin." (Leviticus 19:17 NLT)*

*"Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth." (John 17:17 NLT)*

## 2. Grace

Grace is "unmerited favor", we recognize that it is not only undeserved, but it is outside of ourselves. It is our Advocate, he is digging and fertilizing us. So when we get stuck, in reality we're not allowing the ingredients to get in us.

God models for us that truth between us needs to have grace to truly have healing, growth and fruit.

*"The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, **grace** increased all the more." (Romans 5:20)*

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:29-32)*

## 3. Time

The Advocate asked for "one more year". He is willing to be patient with us, he will work with us in truth and with grace...give it time! It's not just about the quantity of time, either. It's also about a rhythm and sequence of events. The digging needed to happen as the ground softened with rain. The gardener needed to apply the fertilizer as the tree came out of its dormant season. The "year" is necessary because of the timing and order of steps the gardener, our advocate, must take in his work.

Trying harder is not the answer, you will fail and become disappointed, angry and frustration. On the other hand, what if we open up to his truth probing our hearts and lives. Understanding his loving grace that he gives us and in time we will begin to see that fruit and growth we long for.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Whether you have walked with Jesus a long time or short, have you had times when you felt you just weren't living, growing and being fruitful like you thought you would? Honestly what did you experience during these times, disappointment, anger, frustration, how about guilt or shame?
2. On page 2 of your notes there is a category named; "Disappointment, Anger and Frustration". Take a look again at this section, have you felt this way in your life? We may think something like, "why should I even take up space", the only conclusion our minds can come up with is, "Cut it down". You may be surprised how many others in your group have felt the same way.
3. Pastor Randy suggested that, we need three things for growth and fruitfulness, truth, grace and time. In the first chapter of John we are told that the Father is "full of grace and truth". How does God work "truth" in our lives and our relationship with him? Also how should truth function between God's people?
4. We also see that Jesus and the Father are full of "grace and truth". What does that look like for you in your relationship with God? Also have you experienced being the recipient of only grace or only truth from others in the Body of Christ? If so, (without specifics) what did you experience?
5. Our last point on the conditions of growth, is time. In this parable the Advocate asked for "one more year". We see Jesus our advocate and learn something very important about him. Namely he is willing to be patient with us, he will work with us in truth and with grace. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about time? What is he speaking about opening up to his work in us?