



In various parts of the civil service, the question of productiveness has high importance. For example, a search of the websites of the Department for the Economy and InvestNI brings up various references to productivity. An Index of Production, which 'provides a timely indicator of growth in the output of the production industries in Northern Ireland' is published quarterly. Meanwhile DAERA publishes figures on crop yields and production. As you probably know, God also places high importance on productiveness, particularly with reference to His own people. That's the topic I want us to think about.

What do we mean by productiveness? In answering this question, it's helpful to think in terms of agriculture rather than manufacturing. (Manufacturing can be thought of in terms of human effort and activity, but agriculture is about plants, part of God's creation.) Notwithstanding human inputs, the glory for any harvest ultimately belongs to God Himself. Thus the Bible has many references to fruit-bearing. Some of these are literal (look at Joel 2:22, for instance), but many are metaphorical. Thus we read of good fruits (James 3:17), the fruits of righteousness (Philippians 1:11), and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). These are surely evidence of character¹, the character of God Himself, produced in the Christian's life by the indwelling Holy Spirit.



Fruit tree in flower: the potential for a good harvest.

In Mathew 7:16-17, the Lord Jesus says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit". It is clear, therefore, that if anyone has "passed from death unto life" (1 John 3:14) there will be practical evidence of this (see 1 John 3:7&10); in other words, they will produce good fruit. But how much?

That depends... Just think of the parable of the sower, found in Matthew 13 (and also recorded in Mark 4 and Luke 8): we read that the seeds in the good ground "brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold". Here are ways in which Scripture teaches that the Christian can be fruitful for God.

1. "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).

Walk in the Spirit

In Galatians 5, these words appear in verse 16 (and again in verse 25, though a different Greek word for 'walk' is used). The verse goes on to say: "and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh". The following verses expand on the contrast between the Holy Spirit and 'the flesh' – our sinful nature. The Holy Spirit guides and enables the believer to live in a way that pleases God. But we must "walk in (by) the Spirit": we must submit to His leading.

Abide in Christ

John 15 is a key passage on this topic, so you should take time to read at least the first eight verses. The Lord assures his disciples that they are already clean, but exhorts them to abide (remain) in Him. I understand this to refer to communing with Christ and depending on Him. If, even as Christians, we are depending upon ourselves to produce fruit for God, we will fail utterly. There are three other points to which I would draw your attention: (i) fruit-bearing branches experience pruning² (v2), the object of which is to produce "more fruit"; (ii) God's goal is that we bear "much fruit"; (iii) in this, the Father is glorified.

Learn from Chastening

Hebrews 12 teaches that all God's true children experience His chastening (discipline³). The purpose of this, as the passage makes clear, is that we be 'exercised' (trained) by it. Verse 10 describes the discipline as "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." However, experiencing the chastening is unpleasant at the time. To fail to see beyond that unpleasantness is to miss the point, and to lose out on the reason for the suffering – namely, to produce "the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (verse 11, NKJV). Earlier in the passage, the writer, quoting from Proverbs, advises his readers that they (we!) must (i) not despise the chastening of the Lord and (ii) not become discouraged under it. This should make each Christian see life's difficulties from a different, indeed heavenly, perspective.

May we each, by God's grace, be enabled to be like the remnant in 2 Kings 19:30 who "take root downward, and bear fruit upward", and to resemble the blessed man of Psalm 1 who, like a tree, yields fruit in season.

2. The word 'purges' or 'prunes' in the original is very similar to the word 'clean' in v.3. In the context it suggests, in the words of one commentator, 'the removal of such things as parasites and mildew'.

3. I think this is the same idea as the pruning in John 15.