

## **Being Fruitful: Matthew 21:33-46**

*By Scott Salsman (with some minor editing)*

On a recent trip to Washington D.C., Scott Salsman visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It was brought to his attention that hairline cracks have developed in the marbled stone wall that bears the names of the soldiers who died in the war. It seems the stone slabs were cut too thin, and they were damaged by the dramatic temperature changes of the winter of 1994. Some experts predict the monument will have to be completely replaced.

In a way, though, a broken memorial is a fitting monument to Vietnam. The cracks are hauntingly reminiscent of the shattered lives that the war left behind.

In this text, Jesus quotes to the chief priests and elders from Psalm 118, describing how a stone that builders rejected becomes the Lord's cornerstone. Jesus uses this verse to signify his own tragic rejection and to foretell the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus warns that the kingdom of God will be taken away and given to a people who produce fruit. Jesus

**makes it clear that the people of God are to have fruit. But what is fruit, and how does one produce it?**

**The Gospel writer Matthew uses fruit as a symbol for the works of the people of God. Jesus preaches that one should produce fruit in keeping with repentance (3:8); the tree that bears bad fruit should be cut down (3:10); every good tree bears good fruit and every bad tree produces bad fruit (7:17); and the tree is known by its fruit (12:33).**

**Ultimately, God is the source of fruit in a Christian's life, but we can do some things to increase the harvest. Fruit is really the by-product of a healthy plant. Likewise, fruit for the Christian is a by-product of [discipleship] living through God's grace. God will produce fruit in our lives if we honor him in the garden of the soul. We can do this by remembering to:**

**Seed the garden. Before a plant can grow and produce fruit, a seed must be planted. This planting of seed refers not only to the initial beginning of one's journey with Christ. God wants to plant orchards in new fields of our lives. In each of us, there are new gifts waiting to be discovered.**

**Are there times in [our lives when we] have consciously made an effort to cultivate a new talent for the purpose of giving it to others?**

**What new area of [our lives have we] committed to God in the last six months? What have [we] done for God lately?**

**Weed the garden. Every gardener spends time weeding the garden. The weeds of bad habits can sprout and quickly creep up the wall of our lives. In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin tells of his efforts to eliminate the bad habits that plagued him. Franklin concentrated on twelve bad habits in his life and charted his progress, focusing on a different habit each week in a twelve-week cycle. He returned to this cycle at different times in his life, attempting to keep his garden weed free.**

**Feed the garden. We all need to spend time with God if we are to produce fruit. We are fed through activities such as corporate worship, and quiet time with God in reflection and meditation.**

**If we work at keeping our garden in order, the tremendous resources God has given us can produce abundantly more than we ever dreamed.**

**Let us pray...**

**God, our beloved,  
you set before us the goal of new life in Christ.  
May we live in the power of his resurrection  
and bring forth the fruit of your gentle and loving rule. Amen.**

*(prayer from Vanderbilt Divinity Library)*