

## Bearing Fruit

Luke 13:6-9

March 12, 2023

You would think that people would want to put their very best foot forward when submitting a resume, at least check for typo's. Yet, according to the firm Accountemps, here are some real-life excerpts from real people's resumes:

- "Dear sir: I am a rabid typist." We'll hire you as long as you don't bite anyone.
- "I'm a quick leaner." Probably his last job was with the highway department.
- "I seek challenges that test my mind and body because the two are usually inseparable."
- "Here are my qualifications for you to overlook."
- "Hope to hear from you shorty." Calling someone names is not a good way to get a job.

**I've got to wonder if these folks know what it takes to make it in life. It takes hard work.** It takes doing it right the first time. People talk about working smarter and not harder, but that can be deceptive. People who make a difference in this world do both. They have a passion, a vision, a burning desire to be the best they can be.

Baseball fans may recognize the name of former all-star, Brett Butler. Brett was a tiny kid that all the rest of the guys picked on. **"Every day for two years," Brett says,** "the other kids in school would chase me around the playground and try to pull my underwear up above my pants. I would run and run and finally just run home. Every day."

For Brett, the perils of being small didn't end at age twelve. When he played football in high school, they had to go to the junior high school to get his pads that would fit him. His voice was so high that it cracked when he called the signals, and the opposition would laugh. But his dad told

him something he never forgot: "If you don't believe in yourself, nobody else will." That motivated him to give his best.

His high school baseball coach ridiculed him when Brett had the nerve to say he wanted to play baseball at Arizona State (one of the top baseball colleges in the country). **But Brett grabbed his glove and went off to Arizona State anyway.** He wound up as the leading hitter on their junior varsity team, but was not offered the scholarship he desperately wanted. So, he went off to tiny Southeastern Oklahoma State where he eventually became a two-time All-American. **In 1979 he was drafted by the Atlanta Braves in the twenty-third round!** Brett was 5 feet 9 inches tall, weighed 156 pounds, and wore size 7 shoes (the smallest in baseball).

As I said, Brett became an all-star and today is on the coaching staff of the Miami Marlins. Did Brett Butler make it to the major leagues on the basis of pure athletic ability? **Of course not.** Here is a truth that we need to tell every young person "the very best work harder." It's true in sports, in business, in music, in every endeavor in life. The secret of life is passion, determination, desire.

Jesus told a parable about a man who owned a vineyard. In that vineyard was a fig tree- a fig tree that had no fruit on it. **"Cut it down," the owner said to his vinedresser.** *"For three years I have been looking for fruit on this tree and have found none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?"*

Time and time again Jesus showed his impatience with people who do not take advantage of the opportunities God has given them. They are nice, even good people but they are not producing fruit. Christ asks, "what is it that we are passionate about? What is it we are giving your life to accomplish? What fruit are we bearing?"

## **Jesus isn't asking the fig tree to produce bananas.**

Jesus isn't asking anything extraordinary out of the fig tree. He isn't asking the fig tree to become an oak or a redwood. Jesus is asking only that it accomplish what fig trees ought to accomplish bear figs.

We all have different gifts. Some of us have nice singing voices. Some have high IQ's. Some are artists. Some are good with numbers; others are good with people. **All of us have some natural ability.** My ability will be different from yours, each of us has some natural ability. The secret is to find our natural abilities and give them all we've got.

That's what genius is. When we say that someone is a genius, all we are saying is that they gave maximum effort in the area of their lives where they have natural ability. **That's it. That's the secret of success,** find what we're naturally good at and give it our best. A person who can't carry a tune will never sing a solo at The Fillmore no matter how hard they work. **On the other hand,** there are many performers who as young people had quite ordinary voices, and through hard work, thousands and thousands of hours of practice, have become accomplished singers. **It was not that** they had extraordinary talent to begin with. It was that they took what they had and used it to the utmost of their ability.

- Famous opera singer Enrico Caruso was told by one music teacher, "You can't sing. You have no voice at all." Yet he became one of the best-loved singers of his time.
- Beethoven's music teacher told him, "As a composer you are hopeless."
- An editor told Louisa May Alcott that she was incapable of writing anything that would have popular appeal. That, of course, was before LITTLE WOMEN.
- Walt Disney was once fired by a newspaper editor because he was thought to have no "good ideas." Nope, none at all!

Each of these famous people proved to have a certain genius, but was it innate or did it grow out of their dedication to developing what they had been given?

The point is that life does not ask us to become what we are not. The fig tree was only required to produce figs. You and I are asked only to accomplish what our natural gifts allow, but we **ARE** expected to accomplish that.

### **There is one area of life where we are all equally gifted.**

That is in following Jesus and bearing spiritual fruit. The question is, is it that important to us? Are we willing to give it our best? For Dr. Jim Mertz a well-known kidney doctor in Kansas City the question is phrased like this: Do we really love Jesus that much?

- Jim once watched a movie on television. In it he saw a Muslim from India fall on their knees in the dust and heat of the day. Five times a day this Muslim stopped, faced the holy city of Mecca and worshiped Allah. Jim asked himself the question, “do I really love Jesus like that?”
- Back in the early 80’s Jim once lay in a hospital recuperating from a bout with pneumonia. It was a weekday morning in January. He glanced outside at the cold, gray skies and watched the blowing rain that came down all day. **How thankful he was to be inside!** Then, he happened to see at a busy intersection below his hospital window, a young lady, who was standing on the street corner selling roses. She never stopped smiling all day in that cold rain, in the midst of congested traffic, in spite of jeers and sneers of those who on occasion nearly ran her down. **She never stopped**, all day, in the rain to sell flowers for her cult leader, The Reverend Sun Yung Moon. Jim cried as he asked himself that question again, “do I really love Jesus that much?”
- Early one Saturday morning Jim's doorbell rang. He went to the door and was met by two lovely and enthusiastic young people. They

were smiling and anxious to talk about the doctrines of their church. They were not doctrines Jim could accept, but these two young people were so sincere, and so dedicated to their cause that Jim couldn't help but be impressed. As Jim closed the door he asked himself the question again, "do I really love Jesus that much?"

It is not a matter of opportunity, is it? It's not for want of ability. It is a matter of passion, of desire, of giving one's best to God.

**Concerning the barren fig tree the owner** of the vineyard said to his vinedresser, *"Cut it down; why should it use up ground?"* And the vinedresser answered, *"Give it another year, sir. Let me put fertilizer around it and if it bears fruit, well and good; but, if not, you can cut it down."*

**You see Jesus sees the possibilities**, the opportunities for each of us. Jesus is patient with us just as the vinedresser is patient and continues to bless and cultivate us.

Lent is a good time for us to ask the question, "How much do I love Jesus?" Wouldn't this be a good time to ask ourselves whether we are bearing the fruit that Christ means for us to bear, in our jobs, in our homes, in our communities, in serving him? We're not asked to be something we are not. All Jesus is asking of us is that we be the best that we can be.

Amen.

