





# the fruitful been life

# WEEK 1

nathan kingsbury  
brian bradford  
joshua wright

# Intro

Fruit is not optional. There are a lot of things in life that are optional. You can super-size your fries, but it's optional. If you've got enough money to get a new car you can decide on all the options. When you take an elective class at school it's not required, it's optional.

But some things aren't optional. They just come with the order. They come standard. They're required.

Fruit is one of those things. In John 15 Jesus talked to his disciples about fruit. He said it all comes down to fruit. And you can't have fruit without being connected to him. And if there's no fruit then there's some breakdown in your connection to him.

So what is fruit? And what does it mean to be connected to Jesus?

That's what The Fruitful Teen Life that you're about to read is all about.

I want to introduce you to your tour guides through Jesus' vineyard:

Nate Kingsbury, Brian Bradford and Josh Wright are all friends of mine that have at least two things in common with one another: they love students and they love Jesus. In The Fruitful Teen Life they are taking many of the ideas from my book The Fruitful Life and re-interpreting them for students. Basically, they think I'm an old man and can't speak your lingo (or if I did I would just be corny with it.) I'm thinking they might be right. I think you'll find their ways of communicating it to be very relevant to your life.

And I'm also thinking that if you spend the next 40 days reading these thoughts and applying them you'll have a more fruitful life. And that's what it's all about. In fact, it's not even optional.

David Drury  
Author of The Fruitful Life (for adults)

# Day 18

## Can You Hear Me Now?

Have you ever been talking on your cell phone and lost the connection? Have you heard the coined phrase, “Can you hear me now?” Are you having troubles connecting with your boyfriend or girlfriend? Every day you connect with a large number of different teenagers. Connection is made through personal conversation, emailing, phone calls and even body language, but have you ever stopped to think about your connection with Christ?

At the end of your life, the most important thing for which you will be remembered is how connected you were to Jesus Christ. Consider the phrase that nothing of lasting value can happen outside of Christ. Note the word lasting as you ponder what you want to be remembered for in life. Do you want to be remembered for having lots of cash, cars, “cribs”, or possibly being a person who valued his relationship with Christ? We each value different things in our lives making each one of us unique. Personally, I love movies. I love to go to movies, quote movie lines, etc. I sometimes enjoy quoting movie lines so much that my wife gets quite annoyed and gives me that look. Movies and film definitely have some value in my life. However, going to movies and memorizing the quotes does not have lasting value. There is nothing eternal about them.

Eternal values are things that last. The ones that really matter after your time on earth is done. These lasting values flow directly from Christ. I can't do much that has lasting value on my own, but the Bible tells me that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13). My relationship with Jesus Christ empowers me and spurs me on to do things of lasting value. There is nothing else that I put my hope in, other than my belief that when I stand before our Eternal God, his son Jesus Christ will be the first name out of my mouth. It is my relationship with Christ that seals my passage into eternity. As we strive on this earth to connect with different people and grow in popularity, it is all irrelevant unless we know the all powerful, all loving Creator who made himself man in Jesus in order to form a personal relationship with us. -B.B.

Take some time and write down how you can personally begin to produce eternal fruit. (I.e. caring for others, including the unpopular, sharing with those in need) Try to give specific examples in order to challenge yourself.

write here

# Day 2

## History of Video Games....Not!

Do you remember Atari? Or how about Nintendo? You must remember Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo. I started my video game days with an Atari, which is now in video game heaven. Looking at the advancement of video game systems can be similar to looking at Spiritual Formation. It's a very loose connection, but it is fun to compare the two. In my mind I can relate each video game controller (from each system) to levels of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth can be a long and sometimes painful process until Christ is fully developed inside of us, as Paul states in Galatians 4:19. Remember your controller from the Atari game system. It was a joystick with a button on top, giving you only two options to work with. Either push the button or move the joystick. The games were two dimensional and you could play either Frogger or Arkanoid. This joystick relates humorously to our spiritual life before we invite Jesus Christ into our lives. We become bored with just a joystick and a button, and we desire more. Thus, we find ourselves spiritually hungry.

Remember those times when you asked yourself if God was for real and if Christians were not totally nuts? You may be asking those questions right now, so don't be afraid. God calls each of us into a relationship with Himself, and it may be at a different time in life than someone else. But it begins with God giving us a desire for something more. With the Atari controller I had that desire. I wanted something better, like two buttons or a control pad. (Hint Hint) Paul states in Galatians again that we should strip off all the sin that hinders us from growing. This involves confessing our sins to our God and inviting him into our hearts, creating an eternal relationship with Him. Author and Pastor David Drury calls this step "crossing the line of faith." It is a belief in God and what he has done for you in Jesus Christ.

Now we are holding a Nintendo controller with two buttons and a control pad, just waiting to play Super Mario Bros. We have entered into a relationship with Christ and crossed the line of faith. The two oldest of Christian practices can now be a part of your life. The first is Baptism, which is a public profession of your faith. It is getting rid of the old and welcoming the new. It allows you to show others in your community that you are committed to Christ and living a life that glorifies Him. The second is Communion. By taking communion you are saying "I am part of Christ and He is part of me." These two practices are important lines you cross during your spiritual growth. Remembering my Nintendo days, I am thankful that I was able to learn to play video games on such an easy-to-use controller. With my Nintendo controller I developed the skills I now possess today. As you can see I was not given an X-Box controller right after Atari. That would be too much to handle right away. In the same way spiritually, God brings you up just like a mother would bring up a child. He gives us just enough so we can handle it and still trust him.

The next system for me was Sega Genesis. This controller was larger and more rounded than my Nintendo controller. It had a few extra buttons that challenged me to grow in my video game "know-how". As suspected, it took a while to get used to it. Just as each controller with each system gets you deeper into video games, so does the believer's next step in spiritual formation. As a believer, it is highly important that you come to grips with your sin. Sin is the one thing that separates us from God. James defines sin as "knowing what is right, and not doing it."(4:17) How often in junior-high or high school have we known what is right and not done it? Satan even attempts to help us justify our sins. Phrases like, "I only did it once," "it's not hurting anyone," "nobody knows about it," and "it's not affecting me," are great lies told by the father of lies, Satan himself. God's word says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us for our sins..." (1Jn 1:9) Coming to either a member of your community or the Lord and confessing your sins is vital in a Christian's spiritual growth. It is sin that hinders our relationship with God, and fear that keeps us from confessing.

The final and most unique controller yet is the X-Box. Video game inventors have outdone themselves with this one. There are more buttons than one knows what to do with except during a Halo match. The area of spiritual formation relating to the X-Box is discipleship and evangelism. We are commanded by Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations, which can be a pretty hefty command. Throughout our journey of life as a believer we meet people who teach us through sharing their lives with us. Your parents, youth pastor or small group leader can be an example of these types of people. We learn from them, study them, walk the walk with them, hurt with them, laugh with them, and get in trouble with them. (Well maybe not the trouble part unless you get caught tee-peeing a house) It is in these relationships that we are disciplined, just as Jesus disciplined the twelve that he chose. As you grow spiritually through this discipleship, you will begin to share your life with others, which is called evangelism. My favorite definition of evangelism is, "One beggar showing another beggar where he found food." As you evangelize and disciple others into a growing relationship with our loving Father you are fulfilling Jesus' commandments.

I know the video game controller idea can be a far stretch, but it helps me remember how I developed as a believer throughout my life. If you get a chance, ask your small group leader, or maybe another Christian in your church about their journey of faith. I always love to sit down with the old folks and see where God has taken them through the years. We are all on a journey in this life; hopefully yours is rooted in Jesus Christ as your Savior and best friend. Throughout the journey of life we grow just as a child grows into an adult, some of us slower than others. Share your journey with others for it will make the hard times easier and the joyful times that much more fun! -B.B.

Commit to Christ – Baptism & Communion – Confession – Discipleship & Evangelism

# Day 3

## Are You a Branch?

So, are you a branch? You have probably never asked yourself that question before. Am I right? I know that I never have until now. Are you a branch? Are you a part of a bigger whole? Sure you are!

You are a part of a school system, thus you are a branch of your middle school or high school. For me, that was Buckeye High School (although it was in Louisiana and not Ohio) and we were the Fighting Panthers. You are a branch of your family (or family tree), soccer team, or drumline. And, if you are a Christian, then you are a part and branch of the Tree of Life, that being Jesus Christ. You see, we all are branches of something bigger, and hopefully you realize how important it is to understand this idea of being connected to and a part of Christ.

John 15 shows us exactly what it means to be a branch.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

”I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”



After reading these scripture verses what are your first impressions? Pull out a blank piece of paper and begin to scribble or draw (depending on your artistic ability – ha) what is on your heart and mind right now. As soon as you finish this exercise, pull out your journal or more paper and pick out one image and journal wherever that figure or object takes you. -B.B.

# Day 4

## Is It Plugged In?

Have you ever been listening to your mp3 player, and it suddenly goes dead? You knew the dreadful moment of a dead battery would come sooner or later. You just hoped it would last till the end of your favorite song. Or have you been using your new digital camera about to capture the perfect shot when it suddenly turns off? That really makes me upset. We have all heard the infamous beeping sound on our cell phone that reminds us we forgot to charge our phone last night. We quickly find out that without a direct connection to an outlet in the wall we always wind up with toys that lose their power. Even the best rechargeable batteries go dead at the worst times.

As we look at the mystery of electricity and power and how some batteries last longer than others, we have to recognize the source of power in our own lives. Here is a statement I am slowly learning is very true.

## You are powerless on your own

The older I get the more I realize the power in understanding that statement. Think about the moment in your life when you began to think you could do everything on your own. It may still have yet to come for some of you. I think it usually occurs in late junior high or early high school. You begin to become independent and not need the help of others such as parents, teachers, and coaches. You can do all things on your own with your own strength. You use such phrases as, "I can take care of it", "don't worry I have it under control", "that doesn't bother me", and "I am just fine."

All of your frustrations in life come from trying to take control over things you have no power to control. And what has drawn you closer to God than ever was admitting your powerlessness and coming to Him. Examples in your own life may be breaking down and admitting you are struggling with drugs, low self-esteem, pornography, gossip and lies.

This goes against our independence because we try to put up a front that we are all okay, yet inside we are dying. We have two options; either connect with Christ or continue dying. Unfortunately we see an increase in the number of young people who are choosing the dying option, and taking their own lives. But there is nothing more amazing when one young person admits they're powerless to things they cannot control and they turn to God.

This does not just apply to those who do not know God at all. Many of us love and serve God but still struggle with all of life's issues. We must consistently turn to him each and every day whether we just met him or have had a relationship with him for years.

So think about your own life. On a scale of 1-10 how much control does God have in your life? Are you still trying to run on rechargeable batteries or are you interested in connecting to the power source? Think of a microphone. You either have a wireless, like a handheld mike, or one with a cord. We may enjoy the wireless for its freedom to move around and speak but it does not last forever. It could go out of range or lose its battery power leaving the speaker powerless. But with the microphone that has a cord we are sure to have power and clarity. We are connected directly to the power source which gives us all we need. We may have to sacrifice a little bit of independence, but it is worth it for we are much more powerful. As you reach out to your friends who are struggling, your batteries will not go dead for you are connected directly. -B.B.

TAKE POWER IN THIS:

Read Psalm 27 and write down the promises that the writer David found power in.

write here

Think about how these promises can fit into your life. Ask God to give you His power!

# DAVID

## Extreme Spiritual Makeover

Sometimes you just need an extreme spiritual makeover.

Did you ever look in the mirror and not like what you saw? During some seasons of life we actually avoid mirrors. Or other times we move into obsessive-compulsive mirror-gazing. We look to change every little problem we see in ourselves. Nearly all junior-high kids come to a point where they don't like what they see—and unfortunately, our bodies are not usually too kind to us when we reach the very age when we start to care about the way we look.

#### MAKEOVER MODE

In order to solve this mirror problem, people go into “makeover mode.” The way people react to this amazes me to this day—even though it's commonplace in our culture. A young woman's friends will surprise her by showing up with video cameras and TV producers who spring the “good” news on her: we're going to give you a makeover. Now, every time I've ever seen this happen, the girl getting the makeover is ecstatic with joy on camera. Yes! I'm getting made over! But what I don't get is why that person isn't totally offended. Her friends are basically saying, “You look bad. So bad in fact that you will need professionals to improve your looks.” They don't pull her aside and tell her this confidentially, which would be bad enough in my mind. Instead, they spring it on her while being filmed for our enjoyment and her embarrassment. Sometimes they do this on live TV! I just don't get it.

There must be something in those makeover target women that is so strong that it overcomes the embarrassment. Some urge so intense that they respond with joy when told they look bad. That urge must be the desire to change. The desire to be different than they already are. The desire to be better than they have been. We all have this in us. We want to change. But how?

## SPIRITUAL

We get this urge when we examine our spiritual selves as much as our physical selves. Every once in a while we take a too long, too hard look at our spiritual lives. We see every tiny blemish and ugly wrinkle in our spiritual faces. Most days we try to cover these up with our cheerful responses to

“How ya doin?” We even pretend to be mostly content with our spiritual growth when asked or when thinking about it. We reason, “I’m doing better than most.” But from time to time the spiritual makeup comes off, and we take a good long look at who we really are. At that point we usually feel two things: a deep sense of guilt and a desire to change.

### THE RIGHT KIND OF GUILT

Guilt is often a negative motivator. Many feelings of guilt come from other people. That’s one kind of guilt. It’s called secondary guilt. This secondary guilt is unhelpful and may weigh us down and even incapacitate us. Guilt is “heaped on” us by others. You can be freed from that kind of guilt. The Bible says “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1). Guilt heaped on us is condemnation. Others condemn us and give us the ugly gift of secondary guilt. That’s a gift we should not accept. Return to sender.

Another kind of guilt is primary guilt. This is the gnawing kind of guilt that gets at us from the inside. Usually we feel disappointed with ourselves when experiencing this kind of guilt. We get down on ourselves. Every once in a while when I’m driving in a car with my wife or even just sitting in the living room, I will make a noticeable grunt or low sigh. My wife will say, “What’s wrong?” This kicks me out of my thought pattern. Nearly every time that happens, I realize that I am getting down on myself about something. I feel guilty about something I did wrong. It is primary guilt. And the guilt I feel may be 10 days or 10 years old! That inner primary guilt can paralyze me and make me lose all sense of identity as a Christian. That passage in Romans 8:2 continues, saying, “Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” I need to remember that Christ has set me free from primary guilt—and through him I can live in the Spirit.

A third kind of guilt is altogether different. It is spiritual guilt. Many times spiritual guilt is hard to discern from the other two kinds of guilt. Often we will feel guilty about our spiritual lives, but it might not actually be spiritual guilt. It is quite possible to feel guilty about not doing this or that spiritual task or discipline, but only because someone else is heaping that guilt on us. That is just secondary guilt applied to spiritual things.

We also get down on ourselves about our progress spiritually. We look in the spiritual mirror and don't like what we see—this is often just primary guilt applied to spiritual things. We must realize that spiritual guilt doesn't come from ourselves or from others. It comes from the Spirit of God. Spiritual guilt is not negative, but positive. The Spirit points out what is in need of true change and immediately offers the solution to overcoming it.

There is a sure-fire way to tell whether the guilt you are experiencing is true spiritual guilt or one of the other kinds of guilt. If there just seems to be no forgiveness or way out of that guilt, then it was likely heaped on you by others or boiled up in you as primary guilt. If you feel that forgiveness is possible and there is a way to overcome the guilt, then it is most likely being offered by the Spirit. In Hebrews 10:22 it says, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience." When you feel that sense of spiritual guilt, draw near to God and be assured that His forgiveness and way out cleanse you completely.

The process just described is grace. God never gives guilt without grace. There's a lesson here to learn and live. Never accept guilt that isn't accompanied by freeing grace. This is true for yourself and the way you view others. If you find guilt in yourself, allow grace within you to overcome it. If you find guilt in others, allow grace toward them to overshadow it! The guilt is there—it's a matter of fact and a fact of life. But the grace of God is powerful against it. -B.B.

## THE RIGHT KIND OF CHANGE

The second thing we often feel when looking in the spiritual mirror is the desire to change. We feel spiritual guilt and know we need to live differently. We know we want to be better than we've been.

But often we try to change on our own. We use methods that others suggest. We mimic them but it often doesn't work. We don't change in the end. We're the same. We're often even worse because we lose our motivation to change since we tried and failed.

This is all because we're trying to change ourselves. It just doesn't work. Men and women have been trying to change themselves for thousands of years, Take a look around. Pretty obvious that it hasn't worked, isn't it? We need an outside source for change.

In John 15:1-2 Jesus gives us the key to change. Continuing with his beautiful imagery about the vine and branches, he says, "My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." In the first part here, we see the stark reality that fruit is expected and required. In the second part of that verse we read about the spiritual pruning process God works in us. For those branches that show some fruit—God takes a specific action. He doesn't just slap us on the back and say, "Way to go!" and move on. No, he pulls out his knife and cuts us!

Okay, now it does not seem that positive at this point, does it? I heard one guy interpreting this passage, and he said, "I've read John 15 and the way I see it, I'm gonna get cut either way so I better give up." That's not Jesus' intention at all here. Pruning is the process of cutting away the excess on a branch to focus the energy on new growth. If we don't allow God to prune us in this way, then we won't change. In Matthew 5:29 during his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." Now that's an extreme makeover! Why does Jesus say these extreme things? Because we need to wake up to the reality that fruit is what counts and the things that cause us to sin hold back the production of fruit.



## GOING UNDER THE KNIFE

Those in “makeover mode” will sometimes go to such extremes as getting plastic or reconstructive surgery. Some shows on television document this self-obsessive and emotionally tormenting process. They often call it “going under the knife” to improve themselves.

Wouldn't it make more sense to go under God's pruning knife instead? That's his perfect plan for us. In a world obsessed with changing everything about our outsides, we've so often failed to let God change a thing about our insides. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” We branches could bear so much more fruit if we allowed God to do this pruning work in us.

We can't do this surgery on ourselves. Those who have tried know the scars it leaves. How much better—and more effective—to let the Great Physician cut out what he knows we don't need anymore, to prune off anything that hinders a fruitful life. -B.B.

# Day 6

## Do You Produce Fruit?

**JOHN 15:8**

“Jesus said, “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

## An Unproductive Fruit-Bearer:

One of the saddest things is seeing someone accept Christ as their personal Savior, but then to never see any difference in their spiritual life. Yes, they go to church and youth group, but there is no evidence besides them just showing up. Churches and youth ministries around the country have lots of people that just show up. They spend their hour on Sunday morning and claim to be a Christian, but there is no proof of the fruit.

I see countless numbers of students in college and now in my youth ministry that love showing up, but are not active players. People of influence and incredible potential make a personal choice to sit on the bench and not get in the game. One of the hardest things in my life is trying to motivate a person who is comfortable where they are. These people need to realize that their gifts are not their own, but that they belong to Jesus and he desires for us to not be content, but actively seeking him and producing fruit.

## A Productive Fruit-Bearer:

There is nothing more rewarding in youth ministry than a student or leader understanding what it means to produce fruit. This past year I had a leader named Brian Nogar show some interest in being a youth leader. God was working in his heart and he plugged into our middle school ministry. I have seen the evidence of fruit in his life like no one ever before in our ministry. I have seen Brian understand in this past year what it means to be like Christ and produce fruit. I have seen him work hard on being a better husband, father, youth leader, and most of all a better man of God.

In this past month Brian has been feeling a calling into student ministry. Brian now understands the importance of producing fruit and making a difference. Just showing up is not who Brian is. He is an active, giving his all type of player. He is the Micheal Jordan in our ministry and he understands the difference he can make for Christ and in the lives of our middle school students. His fruit is so evident that he passes it along wherever he goes. -N.K.

## Questions:

1. Are you a person that just shows up on Sunday and does your Christian duty? Or are you a person that is actively involved in the game?
2. Do people see the evidence of Christ in your life? What type of evidence do people see in you?
3. What needs to change in your life now and how can you be motivated to start producing fruit?

**Day 7**  
**I LOVE the 80's!!!**

**I know it is pathetic, but even my musical tastes revolve around one era...the 80's.**

I absolutely, positively love the 80's! This is not a joke. I know it is pathetic, but even my musical tastes revolve around one era...the 80's. From Michael Jackson to Toto to The Outfield, 80's music rocks and I love it! But I must admit, this love is not the same type of love that I have for my mom or girlfriend. As a matter of fact, it is even a different type of love than my love for Papa John's pizza. The word "love," as you can see, has many different meanings, although it is one word. Lastly, and the most important love that I am leaving out, is the love for God.

Of all the "loves" that we humans can have, the most vital is our love for God. As a matter of fact, it is part of the greatest commandment. In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment." If you are doing this, then a pack of wild dogs could not keep you away from church or from serving God with all your heart. However, the opposite is also true. If you do not love God with all your heart, then it will be obvious as well. A pack of sled dogs from Alaska could not drag you to church. The ultimate fruit that is produced in the Christ-follower's life should be love!

As a matter of fact, there is an eighties music group (surprised?) that has a song called "Love of a Lifetime." The chorus reads:

I finally found the love of a lifetime  
A love to last my whole life through  
I finally found the love of a lifetime  
Forever in my heart, I finally found the love of a lifetime

Although Firehouse was most likely referring to earthly love, the words accurately describe what our spiritual love for God should be like...life-long and heart-centered. In all honesty, could you describe your love for God life-long and heart-centered? Or does something or someone else have more of your heart than God does?

The next part of the greatest commandment is found in verse 39 of Matthew 22.

“And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” In my opinion, this is the most difficult of the two loves. Loving God is primary, but loving people is the hardest. They are the ones that hurt us, cut us down in front of others, and don’t invite us to the party on Friday night. They are real and evident to us every day. However, they are also the ones that compliment us verbally, go shopping with us, and play football beside us on the offensive line. All in all, our love for people should directly follow our love for God. Although we may hate them and cherish them in the same day, ultimately, we are to love them unconditionally.

In conclusion, I ask you this. How is your love? Now I am not talking about your love for Papa John’s pizza or 80’s music, although those are respectable. Are you loving God as you should? How is that evident in your life? Better yet, how much of your heart does He have? 50%, 75%,? Anything less than 100% should create a re-examination and re-assessment of your life. What about your love for others? Does it bother you that your best friend, boyfriend, etc. does not know Jesus? Do you care enough to say something to them? It is my hope and prayer that after answering these questions, you can honestly say, yes, I love the 80’s, but I love God and others more! -B.B.