

THE COMPASS

Part 3 of "The Eye Chart Gospel": *Seeing Myself God's Way*

The Parable of Good Old Charlie Brown

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I think I'll do a little fruit inspection:

Is my life bearing fruit?

To what extent is my life producing valuable fruit?

What kind of worship fruit am I producing?

Am I growing in worship? Am I more and more able to express my love for God in the ways he really responds to, loving him by loving people? I mean needy people? Unpleasant people? Ugly people?

Am I loving other people more readily and more openly every week, every month?

Or am I actually sort of gradually withdrawing from people bit by bit?

What kind of prayer fruit am I producing?

Am I growing in prayer?

Am I learning more and more to talk with God, to hear from God?

What kind of learning fruit am I producing?

Do I spend quality time reading and studying and meditating on the Scriptures?

Or do I get to the end of a week and say to myself, Well, maybe next week?

Or let's get more practical and down-to-earth.

What kind of parenting fruit am I producing?

Do I find myself screaming at my kids in anger, and afterwards having that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that I really needed to handle it a different way?

What kind of marital fruit am I producing?

Do I find myself growing closer to my spouse? More open? Better able to communicate?

Am I learning how to share my feelings and grow closer to her in the process?

Am I learning how to love Kristina better?

Am I actually loving her more effectively? or less?

What kind of humility fruit am I producing?

Am I able to say, Hey, I'm sorry, I was wrong?

Or do I find myself always managing to come up with a self-defensive excuse, a disclaimer, for why something I did was necessary?

What kind of self-control fruit am I producing?

Still occasionally secretly conducting myself in a way that I would never want anybody else to discover?

Still telling myself I've got a handle on some self-destructive habit, when in fact it's still

got a hold of me?
Is it gambling? Is it a substance? Is it food?

What kind of financial fruit am I producing?
Am I giving generously to God and letting him meet my needs as he's promised to do?
Or am I actually still telling myself, I'm gonna start getting serious about my giving, uh,
soon. Real soon.

What kind of fruit is my life producing?
When I seriously take stock of my own fruit production
in detail like this —

worship
prayer
learning
parenting
marriage
humility
self-control
finances

— I don't like what I see in all those categories.
If you're like me, you get to the end of a string of questions like that, and you're
depressed!

But then there's one more question to consider,
and it's bigger than any of the questions we've already asked ourselves:
When God looks at me,
when he inspects my life for fruit production,
how does *he* feel?
Is he discouraged like me?
Is he angry at me?
Is he disgusted with me? I feel some of that toward myself.
Does he recognize how hopeless I am? I feel pretty hopeless about some of this stuff.
Doesn't he just get sick and tired of dealing with my failures, my weaknesses, my
promises to him that I keep breaking, my resolutions to do better that I keep
falling down on?

Let's hold all those depressing thoughts for a moment, and enjoy a few moments of
Christmas cheer.

Remember the old *Charlie Brown Christmas Special*?
One of the most beloved television programs of all time, I think.
Remember how Charlie Brown chooses that lame little tree?
He looks at that pitiful thing, and he imagines something beautiful.
Everybody else snickers, but not Charlie Brown.

How does Jesus feel when he looks at you?
I can tell you how Jesus feels.
He tells us himself, in **Luke 13:6-9**.

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he

went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.

7 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?’

Who’s the owner of the vineyard in this parable?

A lot of people jump to the conclusion that the owner of the vineyard is God the Father, and the man who takes care of the vineyard, the gardener, is Jesus, God the Son.

They point to **1 John 2:1**: “...we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ....”

But we have to be careful.

Jesus doesn’t say that the owner of the vineyard planted the fig tree.

He says the fig tree *was* planted, *had been* planted, in his vineyard.

If Jesus had specified that the owner planted the fig tree, then yeah, it would seem like the owner is intended to represent God, because God created us, he gave us life.

But that’s not what the parable says.

Furthermore, God the Father and Jesus are not in conflict about us.

The owner of the vineyard and the gardener are disagreeing about what to do with the fig tree.

Our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus do not quarrel about us.

God loves us.

God so loved the world that he gave us his Son (John 3:16).

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

When **1 John 2:1** says Jesus speaks to the Father “in our defense,” whose accusations is he responding to?

Who has accused us? God? No.

Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is our accuser.

He’s the one telling God about all our failures and shortcomings and secret sins and broken promises.

Who owns the vineyard where you and I have been planted?

In **John 12:31** and again in **John 14:30** Jesus calls Satan “the prince of this world.”

When Jesus faced Satan in the wilderness in Luke 4,

Luke 4:5,6 tells us **The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he [Satan] said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”**

God owns this world, but sin makes it possible for Satan to operate as if he owns it.

This is a fallen world.

Satan has made a perverse playground of it.

Jesus says in **John 17:13,14** that we’re in the world but not of the world.

We’re planted here, in a vineyard under Satan’s corrupt management, and we’ve got to bear fruit here.

No wonder it’s difficult to bear good fruit sometimes!

What does Satan say as he strolls through the vineyard he's taken control of?
 Look at that worthless fig tree.
 Look at that miserable excuse for a Christian.
 Look at that sorry, broken-down, pitiful, spineless worm of a person.
 He didn't stick with a single one of his New Year's resolutions again this year.
 You're a loser.
 He's like the children in the Charlie Brown Christmas special, standing around the
 piano.
 Laughing at you. Putting you down.
 He says, God's not interested in your worship. Dream on.
 God's not listening to your prayers. Rent a clue.
 God's not speaking to you, it's your imagination.
 You're reading that Bible of yours, and you're not getting a thing out of it. It's
 gobbledygook, it's a waste of time.
 As a husband, you're a failure. And you're always gonna be.
 As a wife, you're a disaster. There's always going to be another woman more attractive
 to him.
 Look at how those kids of yours are acting. As a parent, you're the biggest joke I've ever
 seen.
 Or he says, Did you see what that guy did? Do you think that's any way for a Christian
 to act? Go tell your friend behind the guy's back. See what they think. That guy
 deserves to have the record straight about him. He deserves to have everybody
 know the truth about him.
 Or he says, Oh, go ahead, have another. It's your weakness. You can't give it up.
 Besides, it feels good, and you deserve to feel good.
 Or he says, You can't give your hard-earned money to the church. What kind of a fool
 do they take you for?

In other words, Satan strolls through the vineyard of our world ... and he *lies*.
 Jesus says in **John 8:44**, ...**When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a
 liar and the father of lies.**

Satan says you're worthless.
 He says, God, come on, let's just put this poor schnook out of our misery.
 Let him die.
 Call his number.
 He's just taking up space.
 He keeps sinning, he keeps failing.
 Even when he tries to do better, he doesn't.
 And he isn't really trying all that hard.
 He's a loser, he's hopeless, he's never going to amount to a hill of beans spiritually.
 Cut him down.
 Give up on him.

But I love the phrase in verse 7:

Jesus is **“the man who took care of the vineyard.”**

Think of it this way: He's got this miserable big shot in charge of the place — Satan —
 and this guy is a slash-and-burn corporate takeover type,
 he doesn't understand the business;
 he doesn't really love the trees, he just loves the profit he can make off the trees —

but Jesus just keeps taking care of the vineyard.

And he says in verse 8:

8 “Sir, leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.

9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”

Jesus doesn’t give up on me.

Any more than Charlie Brown, in the Christmas special, gives up on that miserable little tree.

I may not be bearing any fruit at all, but Jesus hasn’t given up on me.

Worship fruit? I may not even understand what worship is supposed to be all about, but Jesus hasn’t given up on me.

Prayer fruit? I may be clumsy trying to talk to God and hear from God, but Jesus hasn’t given up on me.

Learning fruit? I may not be faithful in trying to spend time reading and studying the Bible, but Jesus still hasn’t given up on me.

My marriage may be a mess, I may not have a clue how to get a handle on my kids, but Jesus hasn’t given up on me.

He says to Satan, “Leave him alone. Leave her alone. I want to spend some more time with that life, investing in it, giving myself to it.

I want to see if I can’t help that person learn to worship, or experience the wonderful joy of real prayer.

I want to bring my Word alive to that person who can’t seem to get into reading her Bible. I love her; I don’t want her to miss out.”

I may not have much heart for the needy at all.

I may have a really negative attitude.

I may even feel *angry* when I hear someone talking about God’s priority of expressing love toward the needy, or of reaching out to people who fail.

I may be clinging to my money and feel totally threatened when someone starts talking about giving to God’s work.

Or I may be giving just enough to ease the guilt,

but I can’t even begin to think about trusting God with my finances,

trusting God to give back to me the way he promises to give back to me if I learn to give generously.

In fact, I may not really trust God totally in *any* area of my life.

And yet, Jesus hasn’t given up on me.

He says, Just give me a little more time.

Let me help. Let me get in there and dig around in their life,

let me fertilize a little,

let me see what I can do.

I may be full of pride. I may always think I’m right.

I may be so full of pride that I don’t even realize I’m full of pride.

I may be utterly in the grip of a habit, maybe a habit that nobody even knows about.

But Jesus hasn’t given up on me.

He’s the one who *takes care* of the vineyard.

Give me a little more time with this one, he says.

I love this one. Let me dig around, let me fertilize.

If you hear a whispering voice in your spirit that says,
 Hey, you're a failure,
 that's not Jesus.
 That's not the loving gardener who wants to see you grow.

* * *

On the other hand, if you're not producing healthy fruit,
 the loving gardener isn't just going to sit down in the shade of your branches and sing
 you pretty songs.

Look how he describes his work:
 He's going to dig around you.
 He's going to fertilize you.
 He's not going to leave your world tidy.
 He's going to gouge you, dig up your world, turn the crusty soil over.
 Then he's going to spread manure.

Have you felt Jesus digging around in your life?
 Has he allowed challenges to come into your life that are more or less forcing you to
 grow healthier spiritual fruit?
 I love the moment in the Christmas special where Charlie Brown makes his first attempt
 to beautify the little tree.
 He puts that one ornament on it, and the tree sags all the way to the ground,
 and Charlie Brown says, "I killed it!"

Do you sometimes feel like God is allowing such serious challenges into your life that
 he's about to kill ya?
 Has he spread just about as much manure as you can stand?
 He has a vision for the wonderful fruit you're gonna sprout!
 Has he brought an annoying person into your life to sprout you some compassion fruit?
 Has he found some clever way to get you to sprout the fruit of self-control?
 Or some healthy marital fruit?
 Do you find the soil of your life being so plowed up and stirred up that you hardly have
 any choice but to grow some healthier prayer fruit?
 Have you looked around and found yourself encircled by the manure of life, and saying
 to yourself, *What can this mean?*, and then practically having no choice but to go
 to God's Word and look for answers?
 The loving gardener is at work in your life.
 Jesus is looking for fruit to grow, to make you more productive.
 He hasn't given up on you yet.

Yes, the day will come when your life is over.
 God already knows the date and the hour of your death.
 The day will come when your bodily tree will finally be cut down.
 But until then, Jesus is willing to work with you.
 He is willing to tend to you.
 He is willing to invest in you.
 He is willing to love you.

He won't give up on you.

He doesn't buy the enemy's lies about you. *Don't you buy them either.*

He sees potential. *Trust him.*

He wants to see you grow. *Let him help you.*

He wants to make something out of you that you may not be able to imagine right now.

Do you feel like giving up on your spiritual growth?

Don't give up.

It's not too late.

Let him work.

See what he'll do.

It's not too late.

In this life, it's never too late.