

***Anthologies from the Forefront:
Getting Closer to God***

By: N. Scott McClelland

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To Kathryn,
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who were patient while Dad was learning.

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To Vince,
who made this and the previous book possible

Finally, to Jesus,
Who beckons us come...

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

It may sound like an outrageous claim, firstly that you can get closer to God, and even more outrageous that this book can help, but I believe it will!

Why?

Because it's a "lessons learned" volume of a pilgrim who is on the road with you, and it covers much of what I have learned and observed in that very process.

Any man who comes to God must believe that He is, and that will reward those who seek Him. Part of that reward of seeking is allowing you to get closer.

The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant; or, more plainly said, He will show you how to understand, appreciate and enter into this highest of all invitations.

Make no mistake, God wants you closer.

My prayer is that this volume will aid in the fruitful investment of your heart and life into Him who knows no beginning nor end.

N Scott McClelland
January 2023

Advancing into Fruitfulness

I want to say straight away that there is a danger that comes with learning because it can bring a gratification of its own. This can be deceitful because we know that we aren't supposed to be hearers only, but also doers. The gratification that comes with learning can (and often does) come before we do anything. If we take learning or understanding as an end in itself, we will not continue forward to do the very task for which the understanding was given. We have to realize this or the understanding that we accumulate will only further bind us in a place of self-deceived disobedience and stop us from fulfilling our purpose.

A Process, Not an Event

There is a process the Lord takes us through on the path to being a useful and contributing member of His body. Keep in mind that the parable of the sower tells us that *two of the four seeds don't result in any fruit*, one brings no fruit to maturity, and one is fruitful. Seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest (see Luke 8:15). Notice the word "patiently" as it is an essential ingredient. This writing is intended to shed light on this process, giving tools to help you advance into ultimate fruitfulness!

It is key to realize that becoming fruitful is a process, and that we must embrace the process if we are to navigate it successfully. I will highlight some stages or signposts you will pass on this journey below,

and as you grow more proficient in your faith, so will your fruitfulness grow. You are also likely to encounter things beyond your control that impact your fruitfulness negatively. Don't let that surprise you, and don't let it stop you. It is not a permanent setback, only a slowdown. You must keep moving. When such negative things happen, heal up and get back in the fight!

As you pass these signposts, try to connect the dots from your own experience with what is written here. This may help you view some of the experiences you have had, both good and bad, in a different light. Try to observe - stop and think - and see if there are consistent elements that have surfaced in the process you have been in. Though you may not have realized it, the life of faith itself is one long process, from the time you meet the Lord (at least) until your stewardship on Earth is complete.

The highlights below are not an exhaustive list, but are those that I have observed in my own process toward fruitfulness while participating in short-term missions training and campaigns. I believe they are true in any type of effort, not just restricted to this context, as truth is equally applicable across all venues of life. If you find truth or wisdom here, grab it!

Exposure

Becoming exposed to something new can be a little dizzying. We are intrigued, impacted, and sometimes thrown off by a whole new world, whether of ideas or geography. At this point, usually our feelings drive us along more than what we know, beginning a sort of courting or honeymoon stage. Feelings aren't bad because they are the seeds of action. Feelings alone cannot survive, as they need to be coupled with action if we are going to learn how to cooperate with what we are feeling and follow the Lord into the places He is leading us by this means. This can be a lot like the sprout with no root in the parable of the sower. When the sun comes out the plant with no root (feelings but no action) withers because it has no root. Because we don't know anything, but we are having strong feelings, we can be moved around

by the feelings in ways that don't make sense and/or don't reflect reality.

When we have feelings that are bigger than the size of our grid to process those feelings, we often fall back on our worldview to stabilize us. This is when our words, attitudes, and behavior betray our worldview in ways that reveal us as beginners. We are experiencing something we have no grid for, and we are trying to apply our perspective onto a scenario that is too big for it. This is a normal part of the process, but we should not stay in this stage too long. We must realize that we don't know what we don't know until we know it and keep moving.

Readiness

It is hard to persist in the context of things we don't understand without giving up, but as we keep moving through our feelings, with an understanding that we need to grow to become useful, we will pass from what we are feeling into an ability to interpret the new environment. This discernment will include understanding how to cooperate with this newness and the cast of characters and context that it introduces us to. By persisting and not giving up, we develop a body of knowledge around **the actual**, which is things as they are, not as they initially appear.

Over time, we cultivate abilities to go with and complement what we are feeling, which round us out in readiness. Now we are entering into a place where we can put to use that great big heart full of feelings in a useful and meaningful way. As time moves forward, we will have persisted past the windswept beginning stage and will enter more fully into understanding what being fruitful actually means.

Commitment

Part of being fruitful is learning how to cooperate with others. With whom are we called to co-labor? We must seek to recognize, understand, and enter into these relationships. These people often may not be who we want to work with, but who we should work with. This

is where we enter into the commitment stage. Unless we commit, we will be stuck in some way in between. Nothing of significance is accomplished solo, despite what the movies and hyper-individualized culture decry as truth.

It's important to note here that this commitment is principally to the Lord and to His will. He is the One who is guiding us, directing our path. He will bring others into our path that we should work together with, but the principal commitment is always to the Lord. This is because the Lord and/or circumstances could change these scenarios and working relationships. It's not only our decisions that affect these working relationships. The other party or parties' actions/decisions are equally impactful. We are focused on following Jesus and loving and serving others, and we have to be careful that this doesn't get switched around on us. Even if things went wrong in ways beyond our control, He will not leave us orphaned. He will come to us. The interpretation here is that He will connect us again in a way that suits His purpose, and all things, now and forever, will work together for our good, because we love Him and we are called according to His purpose!

Fruitfulness

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor (Ecc 4:9). This is not just one plus one equals two; the idea here is exponential! This can be the most difficult part of the process to persist in because anything worthwhile, and with so much promise attached to it, is guaranteed to be bitterly opposed. Also, the closer you get to people, the more you see their flaws, or "humanness," and the more tempted you are to despise them. If you do despise your leaders or co-workers, it breaks down the environment of goodwill and unity that is the underlying foundation for cooperative fruitfulness. This is one of the reasons we are constantly instructed in the scriptures toward humility because pride makes us unyielding toward each other. This can destroy our ability to work together and thereby steal the opportunity that is present. And, have no doubt, nothing pleases the heart of darkness like theft of potential. But this shall not be your fate.

Lord Jesus, help us to navigate forward. Help us to join You in Your efforts and impact, becoming like You, a fruitful vine in a challenged context. Amen. God's grace be yours in your journey into increasing fruitfulness.